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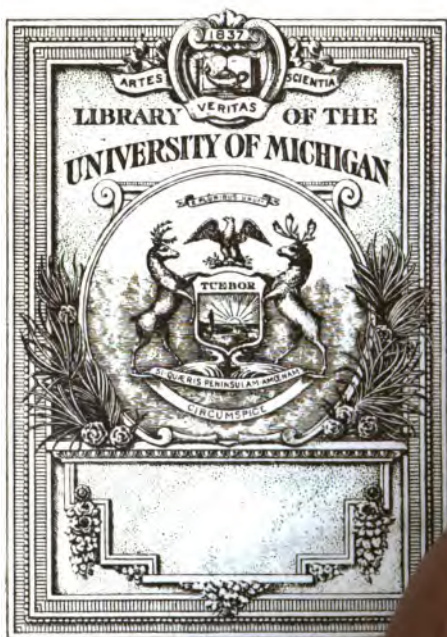
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The light morning breeze was courted by a thousand sails. A bustle might be discerned on board the huge dark ships as we passed by them : the sailors were busy aloft, loosening the sails to dry, or working among the rigging of the tall masts. Already had the business of the day commenced, and boats loaded with merchandize were to be seen slowly towed along, or lying alongside the ships, while their contents were hoisted on board to the song of the crew.

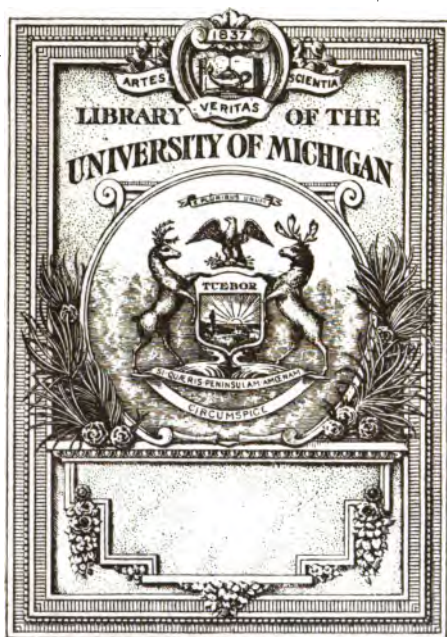
“ Nor did the shore exhibit a less animated spectacle : the wharfs and beach were crowded with people and with cattle ; the country beyond them was studded with handsome habitations ; white buildings peeped through groves of tall cocoa-nut and palm-trees ; and here and there the cupola of a mosque, or the spire of a pagoda, sparkled in the sun : a spirit of life and animation pervaded every thing around us, which, after the dreary captivity and uncomfortable voyage I had just endured, was exhilarating and delightful beyond expression.

“ I shall not attempt to describe to you the endless objects of curiosity and admiration, which at this time, and for long afterwards, continued to arrest my attention ; it would draw out my narrative to a tedious length, and it never would be in my power to do them justice. When we had landed, my friend Cowasjee led me, wondering and gazing around me, to the house of his kinsman and principal, Nosovanjee Bomajee, who, as I have before mentioned, was the chief Parsee merchant in Bombay—a man of enormous wealth, and equal magnificence of spirit.

“ I found this gentleman, like a true merchant, seated in a small interior apartment, attended by three or four of his people, and engaged in listening to some despatches read by a secretary. The room was fitted up simply : it was not in the decoration of his office or person, that Nosovanjee Bomajee displayed his magnificence. The walls were plastered white, and the floor was covered with fine mats, over which at one end, where sat the master and his secretaries, was spread a white cloth. Green blinds at every window mellowed the glare of light, which was farther tempered by the shade of a verandah, or arcaded gallery, which surrounded the whole building. Two or



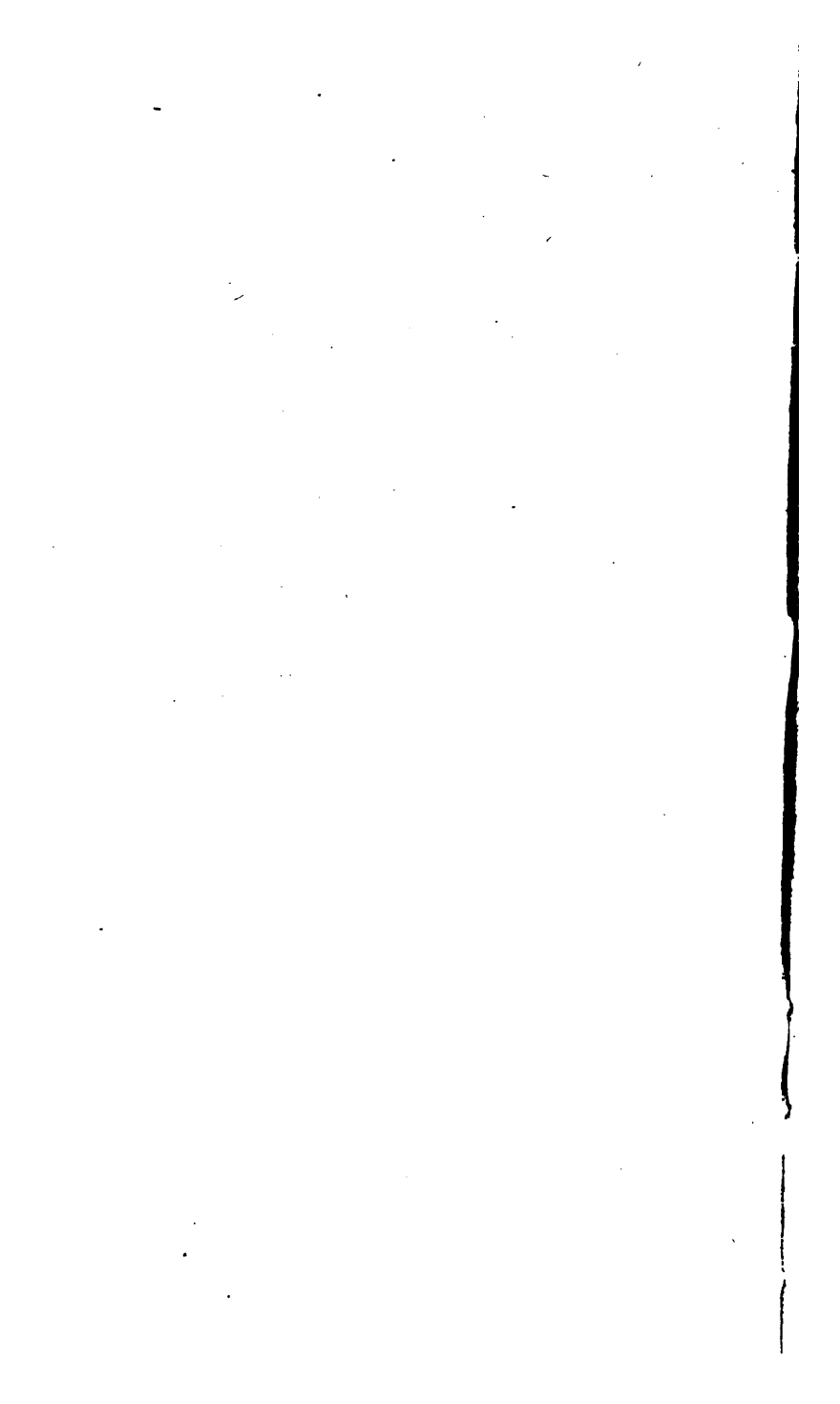


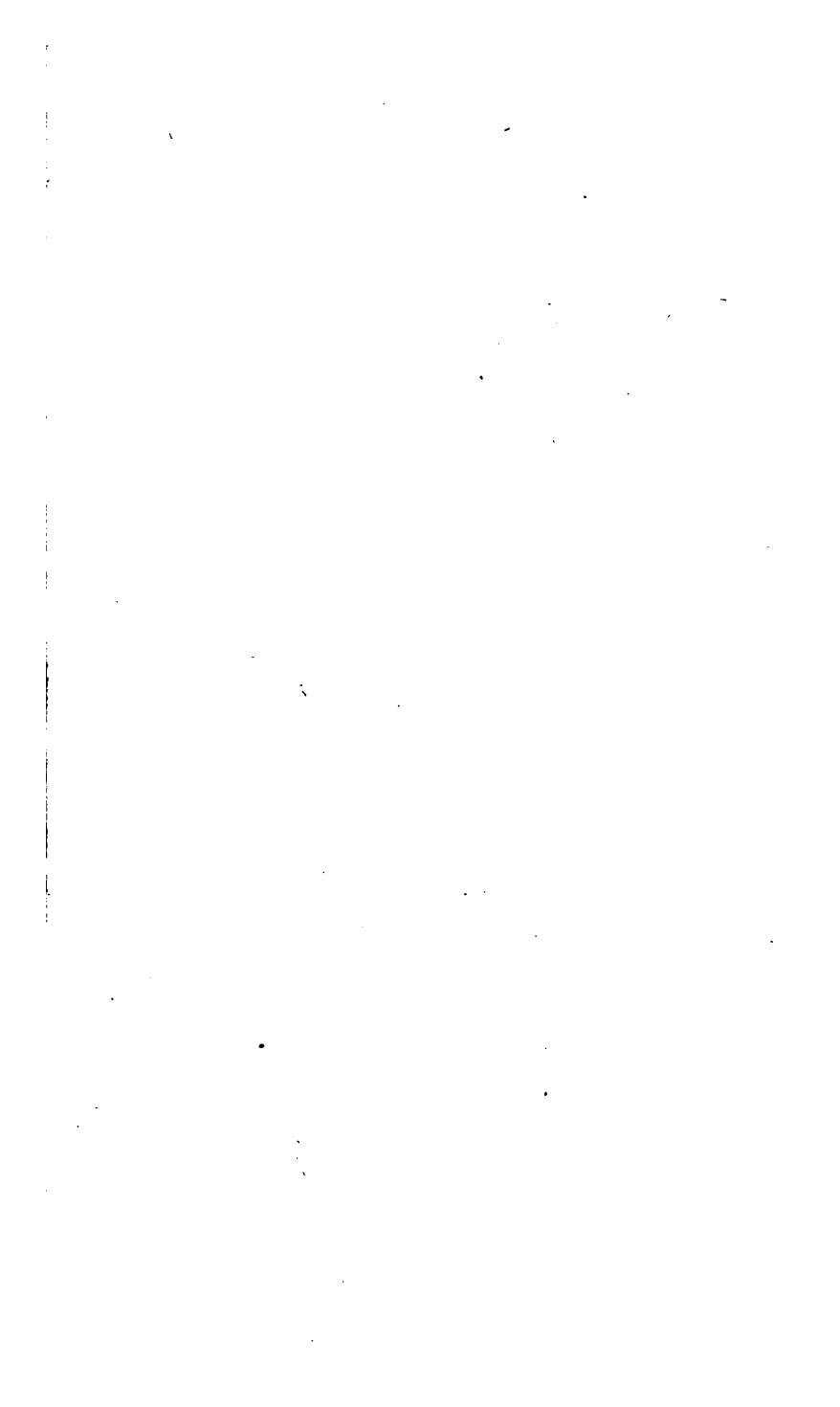


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KUZZILBASH.

A TALE OF KHORASAN.

By James Baillie Fraser

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

NEW-YORK:

G. AND C. CARVILL; W. B. GILLEY; COLLINS AND HANNAY;
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1828.

"The change upon his own person was not less striking than that in his establishment. He was, it is true, an old man when I left him, but his person was tolerably erect, his eye was bright, and his countenance, though not full, was yet by no means remarkably meagre. I now saw an aged man, bent almost double with infirmity; whose sunken cheek, and hollow, quenched eye, declared that his last hour was at hand.

"I cannot, Sir, express to you the anguish of that moment: my heart was oppressed to suffocation; my brain seemed to burn;—I felt myself a parricide!

"He was listlessly smoking his calceoon when I entered, but a heavy groan which I could not suppress, made him quit his occupation, and, setting it down beside him, he raised his glassy eyeballs towards me, as with a tremulous voice he asked me who I was, whence I had come, and what I wanted with him?—'I am from Yezd,' replied I, with a voice more unsteady than his own; 'I am a merchant of Caubul.'—He started, and looked at me more fixedly; but after a few moments, shaking his head, he said, 'Ah, I want nothing from Caubul—I do not trade now: I am a feeble old man, just dropping into the grave—what have I to do with trade? It has cost me all I had!—Alas! what could the treasures of Khosroo do for me now?—go in peace—go—God protect you!'—'What if I have news for you?' said I.—'I want no news,' replied he; 'thy news can have nothing to do with me,—they cannot interest me: go, in the name of God!—I have no reward for thee—if thou wantest alms, here are some dinars, but leave me in peace.'—'Thou hadst a son,' said I, struggling for composure.—'Punah-be-khodah!'^{*} exclaimed the old man, raising his eyes once more with a feeble cry, 'what knowest thou of him?'—'I am he!' cried I, unable any longer to contain myself; and falling on my knees beside him, I hid my face in his lap, and gave way to a passion of tears.

"But the shock was too much for the old man: uttering a faint groan, he spread his arms to clasp me, and fell forward upon my body. We thought for some time that

^{*} May God protect us!

the spirit had quite departed ; but by chafing his hands and temples, and using some stimulating applications, after a while he opened his eyes and recovered his senses.

" It was some time ere he could recollect what had passed ; but when he saw me hanging over him, with the tears still running down my cheeks, in spite of the dimness of his sight he recognized my features.—‘ Ah, my son !’ exclaimed he faintly, ‘ the merciful Allah has sent thee here to receive my blessing before Azrael claims my spirit. I am dying, my son ; I have long been dying :—the belief of thy death has been fatal to thy mother and to me. But, oh, my son, where hast thou tarried so long, leaving thy miserable father in the dark shadow of affliction ?’—‘ And is it possible, my father ?’ cried I, ‘ did the letters I sent thee from Bunder and from Bombay never reach thee ?’—‘ Never, my son : never from the time thou didst quit Yezd, have tidings of thy welfare, or accounts of thy path, reached thy father’s ears. Accounts, indeed, we received, that the caravan with which thou didst leave Yezd, was destroyed by the Balloochoes ; but no word of thee came to satisfy our longings, and we thought thee dead, my son ; and we mourned—yea, these tidings cost the life of thy mother, and I am about to follow her.’

" It is painful as well as needless for me to dwell longer on this scene. The letters on which I had relied to reconcile my father to my long absence, had never reached him. My friends, both at Bunder and Bombay, had remitted the money they had obtained for my jewels, according to our agreement, in the name of a feigned correspondent, so that my father derived no sort of information through those means ; and every thing had unfortunately combined to keep him in ignorance of my fate.

" From the moment my father received, as he supposed, the tidings of my death, he seemed himself to be stricken by the hand of fate. He believed himself the cause of it : he thought,—the good old man,—that the constant and earnest wish he had expressed for me to enter the mercantile profession, had driven me to the resolution which had ended so fatally ; his grief was unassuageable ; he refused consolation, and abandoned all his

usual pursuits. Commerce itself, as the cause of his loss, now became hateful, and he commanded his agents to sell off his goods and close his mercantile concerns. The violence of his grief at length gave way to a settled melancholy, which gradually, but effectually, wasted his strength.

“The effects were still more fatal to my mother. At no period of her life had she been strong, and the untimely loss of her only son and hope, struck her to the heart. She lingered on for three years, and then sank exhausted with weakness and suffering. Her death bore hard upon my father: although never a support, she had been at least an object to him. When she was gone, he had no one to care for, and the gloom of his spirit deepened still more. His old servants still attended on him with the care of customary attachment, and, having nothing to interest him at home, he was induced at times to go and sit in the chamber of his old warehouse; where, though he did not attempt any business, a few of his old friends would sometimes come out of charity to sit with him. This was his only amusement; and it had regularly gone on for two years after my mother’s death;—and thus it was I found him.

“How my heart was racked with remorse at seeing this deplorable wreck of my family—the helpless, hopeless condition of my beloved father! How did I curse my indiscreet passion for travelling, the indulgence of which had led to so much misery! Never, never, I resolved, would I again quit him for a moment;—however long his spirit might yet linger on earth, I swore to tend him with the love and the duty of a son, and to atone, as far as possible, for the wretchedness I had so thoughtlessly occasioned to him.

“Alas! the call upon my affection did not continue long. As if he had but lived to see his son—to know that he had not been a wilful, heartless delinquent, and to bless him before he died,—my father, from the time of my arrival, grew gradually weaker, and in less than two months afterwards expired in my arms. Thanks be to Allah! I received his blessing with his parting breath.

“I was now almost alone in the world. My old mas-

ter had died two years after I left Ispahan, and most of my contemporary students were dispersed in search of employment and of livelihood. I found myself possessed of a fortune as far above my expectations as beyond my wants. When my father gave up trade, the belief in Ispahan was, that his retirement had been caused by losses in business ; but this was by no means the case. Some time before his death he told me this, and strongly advised me to take advantage of the public error. 'Trust the advice of an old man, my son,' said he :—'unless the foresight gained by many years' experience be false, a storm is brewing which may shake the whole of Persia ; the power of the Sooffies is on the decline. Luxury and weakness have overwhelmed the court: oppression, extortion, and injustice are in the provinces, and in every department of the state. Such things cannot long continue without reform ; and revolution at least, be assured, is at hand. We are supposed to be poor,—let the belief continue. Thou knowest the secret repositories of my wealth, and I believe, my son, that thou hast sense to use it discreetly.'

"Besides my father's wealth, which was great, as a life of patient and persevering prudence had been spent in accumulating it, the sums which had been remitted for the sale of my jewels were immense,—far beyond all that I could have conceived possible ; and still there were many of them remaining undisposed of. Thus I found myself perhaps one of the richest individuals in Ispahan, without the disadvantage of expensive habits, and exempt from the danger of being supposed a man of wealth.

"After I had performed the last duties to my father, and had somewhat recovered from the grief which I felt at his loss, I began to think of arranging my worldly affairs. Convinced from my own observations, as well as by the advice of my father, that danger was truly impending over the country, I took such precautions as seemed prudent against its effects. A large portion of my treasure was allowed to remain in the safe repositories where it lay ; but some was disposed of in an equally secure, and more profitable manner, transmitting it by the hands of confidential agents to Moollah Hurmooz, and to my

friends at Bombay, for the purpose of being employed in such speculations as they might think most safe and expedient. They have been faithful agents, and my wealth has been greatly increased by their means. Those who have to struggle against poverty and embarrassment, find money hard to be procured ; while, on the rich and frugal it pours abundantly, and almost without an effort. I lived retiredly, my expenses were a trifle, and the greater part of that was employed in relieving the wants of the distressed.

“ I might now once more have been disposed to travel ; there was no parental tie to withhold me from my favourite pursuit. But there was an attraction of another character, which had lately arisen, and which, in spite of my better judgment, held me with a power surpassing that of duty.”

CHAPTER III.

THE YOUNG MERCHANT'S STORY CONTINUED.—ZOOZFAH.

“ DURING the illness of my father, I was in the habit of repairing at times to a terrace upon the top of the underoon ; a quiet, retired spot, secluded from view by walls and parapets, where I could meditate in peace, and relieve that constriction of the heart, produced by the constant contemplation of a beloved, but dying object, by breathing the fresh air, and looking abroad upon the cheerful face of nature.

“ This terrace was adjoining to another large residence ; and although I did not mean to pry upon the privacy of its inmates, I could not avoid occasionally observing some of them. At first, indeed, I carefully abstained from approaching the side that overlooked a part of their court, and where the parapet of sun-dried bricks would have in great measure concealed me from observation ; but curiosity, excited by various trifling incidents, at last prevailed. The cheerful noise of singing-birds often attracted my attention ; and once or twice I heard the tones of a very melodious voice, singing, as it were to encour-

rage the little creatures. One day I heard the same sweet voice accompanying a sitara;* and my curiosity to obtain a view of the songstress, induced me to commit an indiscretion, the consequences of which I still smart under, and, too probably, must continue for ever to deplore.

"On reaching the parapet of the terrace, and cautiously looking over, I gained a partial view of the little court below, the rest being still hid by a projecting wall. At one end of this court there was an apartment, such as is usually found in the harems of wealthy people, and which partly fell under my observation. The lower part of it was curtained in front; but the Ballakhaneh† above was open. Several cages of singing-birds were hung around the walls, and a young girl, who held a stringed instrument in her hand, was seated, supported by silken cushions, upon a carpet at the upper end. It was she whose voice had delighted me so much; and the first glimpse I obtained of her face, completed my enchantment. I became her devoted slave.

"The weather being cold, her figure was so enveloped in rich furs and shawls, that, however I might anticipate, I could not at first distinguish all its graces: but her countenance resembled those which we imagine to belong to the Peris who hover round the throne of Gian-bin-Gian.‡ Her features were small and delicate; the bright glances of her full black languishing eyes were softened by the long silken lashes through which they shone. The dark pencilled arches of her brows set off the polish of her white forehead, and the soft bloom of her complexion. But I should in vain attempt to describe to you the charm that played about her mouth: its slightest smile—and it seldom was without one—awoke the most bewitching dimples, and displayed a row of teeth like the pearls of Bahrein. I could not distinguish all these beauties at once; but there was no want of time and opportunity in the

* A sort of guitar, with only three strings.

† An upper room, open in front, and generally overlooking another and lower apartment. Hence, no doubt, our English word balcony.

‡ The eastern sovereign of the Genii and Fairies.

sequel to fix them in my memory, from whence they can never be erased.

"I remained entranced at the sight of this lovely creature; who sometimes singing to her sitara, and sometimes springing up to play with and caress her birds, seemed like an angel of innocent and happy sportiveness. Her only attendant, an old woman like a nurse, tried to restrain her spirits and inspire her with greater gravity and decorum. 'My dear child,' I could hear her say, 'these gambols might answer in former days with your old nurse, but you must now learn more discretion; you are no longer a child,—you are past fourteen years of age, and soon, Allah be good unto thee! you are to be a married woman; and what would a husband say to see his wife running about like a young kitten? you must learn to be more dignified, my dear child—you must indeed—you must control these high spirits. But alas! poor dear, the cares of the world will soon render my lessons unnecessary!'

"'Ah! dear Ayeshah,' replied a voice sweet as that of Israfil, 'why will you remind me of my only misfortune?—you know that I detest the thoughts of marriage; you know I cannot bear to hear of this hateful match which my father has made up for me. I never saw the wretch, but I know he is old and ugly: and if he should be cross and take my birds from me, what shall I do?'—'Hush, dear child,' rejoined the nurse, 'do not give your father reason to suppose you hate the advantageous marriage he has provided for you. You know he swears he is not rich; that he has had enough to do with furnishing the dowers of your sisters, and establishing your brothers in their professions; and this offer of Meerza Guffoor's, to take you without a sequin, is too good to be rejected; for, besides saving so much money, the connexion which the Meerza has at court is necessary to supporting his credit when that may be required. At all events, my dear child, there is nothing for you but to obey.—Alas! we women must always be victims to the tyranny of the stronger sex. But come, it is time to meet your father in his chamber; so clear your countenance, and do it with cheerfulness, for he does not wish to see his little Zoolfah sad.' So saying, they both quitted the ballakhaneh, and the light of my soul was clouded as they disappeared.

"From this time, when not in positive attendance upon my father, the terrace became my constant resort. Many times in every day did I repair to listen for the voice of the enchantress who had enslaved me, and to catch a glimpse of her in the ballakhaneh. Sometimes I was successful, and every view of the adored object strengthened my passion and confirmed the spell that bound me. I reflected with alarm on what the nurse had said, and was terrified at the possibility of having this lovely creature snatched from me by a marriage which she so greatly detested. I would fain have sought an interview, but the very horror she expressed at men and marriage, deterred me from attempting what I feared might inspire her with disgust, and deprive me of the satisfaction which I had in beholding her, even at a distance.

"Wearied out at length with the pain of unrequited and concealed love, I sought for relief in exertion, and resolved upon making an effort to know something farther regarding my mistress and her family. For this purpose I sought out one of those convenient females, whose age and ostensible occupations procure them free entrance into all harems, and who are often useful in promoting the union of young people who love each other. But an occurrence took place before my plans were ripe which gave me unlooked for facilities, and flattered me into better hopes of success than I could otherwise have possibly entertained.

"Returning from the caravanserai, and passing by a lane, which led to one of the public baths of our quarter, on a day when it was appropriated exclusively to the use of the women, I heard a cry of alarm, and looking for its cause, I saw two men, apparently intoxicated, assaulting three or four veiled females, who were returning from the bath. Shocked at so scandalous, as well as so unusual an occurrence, I ran forward, and shouting aloud, forced them to quit their prey ;—indeed, they hardly stayed to dispute the point, but, alarmed perhaps at their own audacity, took to their heels and fled.

"Turning from them to the trembling females, who were endeavouring to repair the derangement of their dress, what was my astonishment to recognize in one of

them the lovely creature whose image was so deeply imprinted on my heart ! In attempting to replace her disordered veil, it fell off her head entirely, and exposed her beautiful countenance in all its charms. Her eyes rested for a moment on me, but were almost instantly withdrawn, while a crimson blush, over all her face declared her painful confusion. I hastily withdrew my glance, and the old nurse stepping forward, assisted to arrange the screen which shrouded her entirely from my view.

“ ‘ We thank you, young man,’ said she, while I stood transfixed with surprise and delight ; ‘ we thank you for your timely succour, and not less so for your polite delicacy : and be assured, that though this unlucky event has been the means of discovering to you the face of this dear child unveiled, her father, the Cazee Meerza Mootalib, will not be the less grateful for the service you have rendered to his daughter ; while we, on our parts, feel secure that you are too much a man of honour to take any undue advantage of the accident.’

“ ‘ Ah ! respectable Ayeshah,’ cried I, entirely off my guard, ‘ be assured that from me the lovely Zoolfah can never meet with any thing inconsistent with the highest respect and the most devoted attachment.’

“ ‘ How is this ?’ cried the nurse, starting with surprise ; — ‘ Ayeshah ! — Zoolfah ! You know us, then, young man ? — Who are you then, and how ? — But what am I doing ? — Let us return home ; it would be a fine thing indeed for us to be seen talking with a man ! — but this business must be inquired into.’ — ‘ Ah, excellent Ayeshah ! May your servant find favour in your eyes — all shall be explained to you, but allow me to guard you home, these insolent fellows may yet return.’

“ The old nurse made no reply ; but taking the arm of Zoolfah she hurried forward, and I heard her mutter to herself, ‘ Insolent said he ! — Yes, indeed ; there may be more insolent fellows than one knows of ! — and yet the youth is handsome, — yes, and modest too. Laillah-e-ilullah ! respect ! attachment ! Why, this is like love, I protest ! Allah preserve us !’

“ I followed at a respectful distance, until they entered their own door, from which, as soon as I had turned my

back, I observed a slave steal out and follow, keeping me in view. To this I had no sort of objection; I rather courted the old lady's inquiry, and purposely walked slowly, until I reached the door of my father's house, when the slave, having made her remarks, passed on without appearing to heed me. 'The good gentlewoman shall be satisfied,' said I to myself; 'and this is no bad introduction: prudence and discretion may now bring matters to a fair issue.'

"I now directed my female agent to seek the nurse's acquaintance, and try to gain some information respecting the circumstances of my mistress' family; nor did she fail in her commission. It was not long ere she let me know that the lovely Zoolfah was the daughter of an old judge, the Cazee Meerza Mootalib, with whose name I was perfectly acquainted, and who had the reputation of being very stubborn and ill-tempered; very miserly, and by no means incorruptible:—that he had three sons, one of whom was studying the law, with the intention of following his father's steps; another was already employed as a Meerza about the court; while the third, the youngest, and the favourite, was a young debauchee, who alone could wheedle his father out of as much money as would support him, though not by a great deal as much as he spent by getting into debt wherever he could obtain credit. He had several daughters already married, and my mistress was the only one remaining on his hands. The man to whom he had promised her in marriage was an old sensualist, a dependant on Mahomed Koolee Khan, the Aite-mad-u-doulut,* and said to be possessed of great influence with his master, which was the Cazee's chief object in promoting the match.

"My agent had endeavoured to discover what opinion was entertained of me both by the young and the old lady; and her report was very flattering to me. The nurse, upon discovering that she was acquainted with me, had questioned her very particularly respecting my family and character; but all the mystery was solved as soon as

* "The hope," or "dependence of the state," a title bestowed on officers high in the confidence of the king—generally on the Prime Minister, or Vizier.

she heard I was so near a neighbour. The steadiness and sobriety which were attributed to me by my emissary, did not fail of engaging her esteem; particularly as she had also taken upon her to correct the mistake which they, as well as the public in general, had fallen into, of supposing my father to have been a ruined man. This she not only contradicted, but offered to prove the fact, by procuring from me, for the respectable Ayes Shah, such presents as should convince her that I was no poor wretch. But this the old lady would not listen to at present; nor was it until after a long negotiation,—till she discovered that the sight which her charge had obtained of me on the eventful day close to the baths, had produced a very powerful impression in my favour, and had increased the horror with which she contemplated her intended marriage,—till she saw that the health of her dear child was suffering from apprehension,—and until some well-timed and handsome presents had convinced her that I was not only a prudent, but a wealthy lover, that she consented to yield her aid in breaking off the odious engagement, and forwarding the object of my ardent desire. An interview was contrived, and I was introduced, confused and agitated myself, to the trembling Zoolfah, who received me still closely veiled: and it was not till after the most earnest entreaty, accompanied by the most solemn assurances of my honourable intentions, and supported by the desire, nay almost by the manual exertions of her nurse, that she half discovered those blushing charms which I had so often gazed upon from a distance.

“I now discovered to Ayes Shah so much of my situation as was sufficient to secure her full confidence, and urged the timid Zoolfah to consent to become my wife. But the difficulties in our way were extremely great, nor could we see any probable mode of removing them. My riches, no doubt, far exceeded those of the intended bridegroom, but his influence and power at court were the great objects with the Cazee, and with them I could not, at present at least, by any means compete. A bare allusion to the subject might be enough to put the old gentleman on his guard, and prevent all future intercourse between us.

“Meerza Guffoor, his intended son-in-law, had been

sent to one of the northern provinces, on business of importance; but so soon as he returned, it was intended that the marriage should take place. The interim was ours to act in,—and to prevent it, if we could; but no expedient occurred to us better than that of carrying the lady off; a plan full of hazard in every way, as it would be almost impossible to conceal ourselves long in the city, while the difficulty of travelling along the public road with sufficient rapidity to elude pursuit, even if we should be so fortunate as to pass the Rahdar* stations unsuspected, was so great as to leave us little hope of success.

“We continued to meet each other for some time after my father’s death, contenting ourselves with the imperfect satisfaction which these interviews afforded us, in the hope of something more favourable occurring to assist our invention. But circumstances which we could never have anticipated, occurred at this time, and changed the complexion of our affairs, along with the circumstances of the whole country.”

CHAPTER IV.

THE YOUNG MERCHANT’S STORY CONTINUED—THE SIEGE.

“THE late extraordinary revolution which has broken the power of the Suffavean kings, and almost extinguished their race, was at this time neither commenced nor contemplated. The extreme weakness of Shah Sultaun Hoossein, and the profligacy as well as inefficiency of his officers, had for a long time given reason to all thinking men to dread some great public calamity; and the revolt of the Lesghees on the west, with the attacks of the Abdallees and other Affghauns upon the east, had in great

* Rahdars are guards or keepers of the road; a sort of police established at particular stations for the purposes of collecting duties, preserving the peace, and protecting travellers against thieves and robbers. The latter duties they give themselves but little trouble about; they are strict enough as to the former,—whether for the behoof of themselves or government, may be a questionable point.

measure justified their apprehensions. But the submission of Vactanga, Wullee of Georgia, and the check received by Meer Mahmood Ghiljee at Kermaun, which, for the time at least, had put an end to his hostile intentions against Persia, had quieted our rulers' minds, and lulled them into a fatal security, from which they were only roused by the thunder of the coming storm,—too late to provide against its fury.

“Early in January, 1722, a certain degree of alarm was excited at court, by tidings that Meer Mahmood, chief of the Ghiljee Affghauns of Candahar, had at length thrown off the mask, assembled an army of full thirty thousand men, and crossed the Desert towards Kermaun, intending to lay siege a second time to that city.

“The city itself soon fell, but the citadel held out so firmly that Meer Mahmood, fearing to discourage his troops by the loss and delay he must sustain from a protracted siege, was glad to negotiate with the garrison, and to accept of a sum of money, upon condition of leaving the city and its inhabitants unmolested.

“The news of this repulse—for it could be called nothing else—in some degree abated the weak and helpless terrors of the government; and though these were again revived by hearing of Meer Mahmood's march against Yezd, the serious check which his arms sustained from the courageous opposition of its inhabitants, again allayed their alarm.

“What, then, was the dismay of the weak monarch, and the supine, improvident minions of his government, when they heard that the Affghauns, raising the siege of Yezd, were in full and rapid march towards Ispahan! So quick were their movements, that no intelligence reached the city till the whole divan was thrown into terror and confusion by learning that their enemies were within a few days' march of it.

“So bold a measure as that adopted by Meer Mahmood, of marching directly on the capital, without heeding the prodigious tract of Desert, and several unconquered strongholds in his rear, never entered the imagination of any of the King's counsellors, and they were totally unprepared to oppose them. The few troops

within reach were collected, it is true, and a levy was instantly ordered of all that were able to bear arms, so that in a very short time upwards of 50,000 armed men, with a formidable artillery, were collected to oppose the enemy. But panic had already spread itself among their ranks, and the major part of them had little courage, and no discipline.

“The worst part of the business was, that from a council composed of pusillanimous, corrupt, or treacherous men, no measure of sound or effective policy was to be expected. The principal officers were divided in opinion and opposed to each other in their private interests. The Aitemad-u-doulut proposed to act entirely on the defensive until the troops should have become somewhat familiar with the presence of their enemy, and until that enemy, wearied and dispirited with a protracted, unprofitable warfare, would be glad to secure a retreat instead of dreaming of farther conquests. Abdoolla Khan, the Wullee of Arabia, on the other hand, gave it as his opinion, that it was beneath the dignity of the empire to temporize with rebels, and that the troops should be led against them the moment they approached. It was unfortunate that, the Wullee possessing powerful interest at court, his advice was followed; the consequences you probably are well acquainted with.

“Never shall I forget the ferment which reigned in the city, when the Affghauns arrived at the village of Goolnabad, only three fursungs distant, and there took up their position. But the inhabitants were almost as much agitated by indignation as by alarm, for they had not yet entirely lost confidence in the power of the government, and in the valour of its armies. The astrologers; too, having consulted the stars on the occasion, fixed on the eighth of March as the fortunate day on which the Lion of Persia should revel in the blood of its enemies; and in truth, at first, there did appear some grounds for entertaining hopes of a favourable result.

“Meer Mahmood, not without uneasiness at the possible consequences of the bold step he had taken, and anxious, in particular, for the event of a day which, in all probability, would either totally annihilate his power or lay the

foundation of his future fortune ; ignorant also of the number or quality of the troops that might be brought to oppose him, resolved to act cautiously, and, intrenching his camp, awaited the attack. Our leaders, on their side, taking courage from a conduct which betrayed irresolution, if not timidity, and which had also its effect upon their troops, led them forth from the walls on the seventh of March, and took post in front of the enemy.

"In truth, it was a noble and an interesting sight to see these troops—our countrymen—our friends—our defenders, pouring in multitudes from the gates, glittering in their best array, mounted on the finest horses, all gay and ardent to fight for their homes and their property, for their wives and children, many of whom, mounting the wall, cheered them with their voices, praying to Allah for success upon their arms, and confusion and defeat upon their enemies.

"The Affghauns, on the other hand, who did not amount to half the number of their opponents, made but a sorry appearance, with their worn-out clothes, their soiled armour and jaded horses ;—nothing glittered among them but their arms. But an old officer, who stood near me as we viewed them, shook his head :—' Ay, ay,' muttered he, ' the bare back makes a stout heart ! the best to fight are those who have steel behind, and gold before them ! God grant we do not change coats with these fellows before long !'

"The doubt was, alas ! prophetic. After much debating, the attack was unfortunately resolved on. Our countrymen charged the enemy with an impetuosity that gave the most sanguine hopes of a happy issue, and for a while, the victory was so little dubious, that Meer Mahmood, who thought that all was lost, at one time had ordered his swiftest dromedary, to fly from the field. But valour was vain against treachery. Abandoned by the infamous Wullee of Arabia, who of all the leaders had been the one most eager to fight ; and surprised by a masterly manœuvre of Amaun Oollah, one of the enemy's generals, by which the whole of the artillery was taken and turned against ourselves, our troops were forced back in confusion, and fled, leaving the field covered with those

who, but an hour before, were exulting in the pride of manhood and the confidence of victory.

"It is impossible to describe the horror and consternation which seized on all the inhabitants of that great city, when they beheld this utter ruin of their hopes. As the beaten and panic-struck troops poured back through the gates they had issued from but the day before with so much confidence and splendour, you would have thought that all hope was past, and the enemy already in possession of the walls :—the merchants shut up the bazaars, the trades-people ran and hid themselves, and the women, shrieking with affright, fled wildly here and there, believing that the terrible Affghauns were at their heels, ready to perpetrate any sort of atrocity. So great was the confusion, that the gates were left totally unguarded ; and had the Affghauns possessed as much judgment and determination in their councils, as they evinced courage in the field, there is no doubt that they might that day have made themselves masters of the capital. The abject prostration of mind that reigned through all ranks of men is not to be conceived ; the countenances of every one you met betrayed the extreme of terror, and the smallest shout or noise at a distance made every one run as if the enemy were upon them.

"It is a curious, though a mortifying fact, that the enemy were hardly in less alarm than ourselves. Confounded at the magnitude of their victory, and almost doubting its reality, they kept close within their camp to guard against a surprise. The very guns which they had so gallantly won, they did not attempt to secure ; and certain spies who were sent from the city towards the Affghaun camp, found every thing there so quiet, that our leaders were encouraged to send out some troops, for the purpose of carrying off these cannon, which was effected without the smallest opposition from the Affghauns. Nay, to so unaccountable a degree did this irresolution of Mahmood, and the alarm among his troops, extend, that on the very day which brought to the Meer proposals for negotiation on the part of the Shah, with the offer of a large sum of money, provided he would instantly quit the country and retire,—they, on their part, were just about to mount their

horses, in order to commence their retreat, and would have thought themselves too happy if permitted to retire unmolested : but this unlucky proof of weakness and terror opened the Affghaun's eyes ; he saw his advantage, and resolved to avail himself of it, by marching up to invest and assault the city.

"I do not mean to describe to you the operations of the Affghauns, nor to detail the disgusting tissue of feebleness and treachery, by which, far more than by the sword of Mahmood, the city of Ispahan fell into his hands. I shall only mention such occurrences as more particularly affected myself.

"From the period when danger began seriously to threaten the country, although I continued occasionally to see my mistress as usual, the obstacles to making her my wife appeared to augment rather than diminish. Her father's anxiety to obtain Meerza Guffoor for his son-in-law increased with the danger of the times, and his impatience for his arrival from Casveen, where he was still detained by business, became excessive.

"The confusion consequent upon the battle of Goolnabad affected every individual family of the city. A time of so much public calamity was ill suited to promote a lover's views. I sometimes enjoyed an interview with Zoolfah, and endeavoured to quiet the alarm which she, in common with every female, experienced at the terrible situation in which the city was placed ; but her father, trembling for his treasures and his life, passed the greater part of his day within his harem, and insisted on his daughter's company ; so that our opportunities of meeting were greatly diminished.

"Occurrences calculated to keep our alarm awake took place almost every day. Within the first week after the enemy advanced to invest the city, the Armenian suburb of Julfah was carried by the Affghauns ; and the dreadful terms* upon which it was spared the horrors of an assault,

* Father Kruzinski, in his History of this Revolution, informs us that these terms were a payment of about four hundred thousand pounds sterling in money, and fifty of the noblest and most beautiful young girls of the Armenian families in the place. The fulfilment of the last article he describes as giving rise to scenes of the most heart-rending distress.

sounded as a knell of despair, not only to the daughters of Ispahan, but to the parents, the brothers, and the lovers of every maiden within its walls. The towns and villages of the neighbourhood, one after another, were pillaged and destroyed by the enemy, who murdered the men, and carried off all the young women: daily did some of these poor wretches arrive, after having suffered the most horrid abuse, to seek protection from us, who trembled for ourselves.

"Time wore on: the bridge of Abbasabad was seized, and the city, completely invested, was cut off from all supplies. No one had imagined that the enemy would ever have the audacity to lay regular siege to a capital containing six hundred thousand souls, with an army not exceeding twenty thousand men,—and consequently no provision had been made for such a contingency. We now paid dearly for this neglect, for scarcity began to make its appearance in the place, and all who thought at all about the matter, looked forward with dismay to the horrors of a famine.

"Neither the king nor his counsellors were of this considerate number. Indeed, the weak and infatuated Shah Hoossein, foredoomed as it should seem, to destruction, rejected the advice of all his most honest servants, even when so clearly correct that it was seconded by his own judgment, and suffered himself to be cajoled by the artful machinations of the infamous Wullee of Arabia; who, though now in full correspondence with Mahmood, still held a principal command in the place, and, strangely favoured by fortune, succeeded in thwarting every attempt that was made to succour the unhappy monarch and his devoted capital.

"The scarcity, which now began to be severely felt, roused even the populace, as well as the higher ranks, to a fuller view of their situation: they compared their own

The girls were chosen by lot, and torn shrieking from the arms of their mothers! Many of them died of mere fright and grief before they reached the Affghaun camp; and the despair of the survivors was so great, that it worked even on the feelings of their savage conquerors, who sent many of them back at once, and the rest were restored to their parents after the capture of Ispahan.

numbers with those of the Affghauns, and, ashamed of the disgrace they were suffering under, as well as irritated at the distress they began to feel, demanded of the Shah to be led against the enemy. A sally, headed by the brave Ahmed Aga,* was made, and was successful, until directly opposed by the watchful villany of the traitorous Wullee.

“ The cruel and calculating policy of Meer Mahmood increased the misery of this disastrous siege. Aware of the multitudes that were contained within its walls, and fearful that, in case of capitulation, there might be danger of revolt when the inhabitants should learn the scanty number of their conquerors, he resolved to reduce these inhabitants by the miseries and disease attendant upon a famine ; he therefore purposely protracted the negotiations, and withheld his troops from any attack, confining them merely to intercepting all convoys, and carefully cutting off every source of supply from the city. Another reason which induced him to refrain from assaulting the place, was his desire to save from general pillage the mighty spoil which he promised himself in the Shah’s treasury, and the riches of the nobles and the merchants. But when his chiefs urged him to put an end to so irksome a siege by an assault that must succeed, he professed that the regard he had for the lives of his soldiers, and the wish also to prevent the utter desolation of a city which he hoped to rule over as prince, were his motives for a delay that so greatly distressed and irritated his followers.

“ Thus month after month came on, bringing want and misery along with it. By the beginning of July, the usual market-meats were exhausted, and the flesh of camels,

* This brave officer was an eunuch, and had others followed the example he set, Ispahan would never have fallen ; but the infamous Wullee of Arabia, resolved, as it would seem, to effect the ruin of his master, not only thwarted him in every gallant attempt he made to repulse the enemy, but denounced him to the Shah as a forward person, who interfered with the business of his superiors. Ahmed Aga, indignant at the rebuke which this complaint occasioned, replied with spirit, and declared boldly to the Shah what were the Wullee’s designs ; but, finding no attention paid to his remonstrances, he disdained any longer to serve so weak a Prince ; he took poison, and was found the next day dead in his bed.

horses, mules, and asses was publicly sold in the bazaars. In the month of August even these failed, and the carcass of a horse, lean as it was, would sell for five hundred sequins.*

"As the pangs of hunger increased, the people were forced to satisfy their cravings with the flesh even of unclean animals; dogs and cats† were eaten and sold at extravagant prices; even mice and rats were devoured, and happy was he who could get hold of them. But the worst was not yet come; corn had failed as well as animal food, and roots of herbs, the leaves and bark of trees, were pounded into meal and sold instead of bread. Hides and leather, even old shoes, belts, and water-skins—every thing of the sort that could be found, was boiled down for the purpose of sustaining life.

"At length the tortures they endured forced many to the last horrible means of assuaging their pangs, and human flesh was plentifully devoured. No sooner was the example set, than men appeared at once to reconcile themselves to this outrage on human nature. They even seemed to dread lest the resource should fail them, and made hoards of this disgusting food. Persons were seen cutting limbs from the carcasses in the streets, and children were stolen and put to death, to serve for future repasts. To complete the horrors engendered by this dreadful visitation, it was too certain that the ties of kindred were no protection to the dead,—that to avoid a more public violation of decency, brothers and sisters had devoured each other; and that mothers were found to have subsisted on the bodies of their own infants!

"The mortality which ensued was commensurate with the calamity that produced it. At first, some attention was paid to the remains of those who died, and their bodies were removed, and decently interred. But by degrees, the number increased so much, that those who were ap-

* * More than 200*l.* sterling.

† Father Kruzinski relates, that he saw a woman herself struggling with a cat in order to strangle it, until her hands and arms were all bloody with the scratches inflicted by the animal; she would not, however, let go her hold, but at every fresh scratch or bite, she exclaimed, "Strive thy fill, it is in vain—I will eat thee for all that!"

pointed for the purpose, were not equal to the duty, and the corpses remained unnoticed in the street, or the house, where they had lain down to die. But when the quantity of these increased so much, that the air became tainted by them, another effort was made by the living to remove the dead from among them. The bodies were thrown over the wall, into the bed of the Zeinderood river, in such numbers, that the waters became putrid, and continued undrinkable for a year after. Even this compendious method at last became a task too fatiguing for the worn-out and emaciated survivors, and the corpses were left to rot where they fell.

“Never can that awful period be forgotten by me, or by any of those who survived it. The long bazaars of Ispahan, silent and deserted, resembled a city of the dead. In walking along, you stepped continually on carcasses; and often a ghastly figure, with sunken cheeks and withered lips, would try to raise itself from among them, and fix its glassy eyes on you as you passed. The sights of horror were innumerable—not to be described. Old men, emaciated to skeletons, had quietly yielded up the ghost beside their grand-children, whose fair smooth cheeks scarcely showed the hand of the destroying angel. And men, who had resisted almost to death the dreadful expedients which had preserved the lives of others, had sunk exhausted, or died in the act of commencing their last horrid meal. In spite of all this misery, pillage and rapacity did not slumber; thieves and robbers plied their trade unappalled: the dead were stripped in the streets; and the wolves, the jackals, and the hungry dogs, which had escaped the general slaughter of their kind, entering the city by night, disputed for their share, and helped to mangle the dead.

“Whole quarters of the city were totally depopulated, and in their silent habitations might be found the families that had dwelt in them, lying just as death or weakness had seized on them. But these were chiefly women; the men had wandered out to die. The women, when all sustenance had failed, and every hope of relief had passed away, often laid themselves calmly down to wait for death; and there you might see the wives of one man who never

loved each other in life, forced by mutual misery into a fellowship in their last agonies—or the sisters, who had never been asunder from their birth, still united in death—or the mother whose infant had expired in the vain effort to draw nourishment from the breast which had long ceased to yield it. Some families there were, who, shrinking from the protracted misery endured by others, took means to hasten the catastrophe. The father prepared his last meal, and mingled it with poison ; and wives, children, slaves, and servants, found a speedy end to their sufferings. It was dreadful, in wandering among these deserted habitations, to see them all, the old, the young, and the infant, alike stiffened in death ;—but the mind grows familiar with horrors as with other strong excitements : we became accustomed, if not reconciled to them, and reckless of the future.

“ It was full time for these scenes to have an end. From the best accounts that could be kept under such circumstances, it appeared, that out of the population of six hundred thousand souls, which the city contained when the Affghauns appeared before it, not quite one hundred thousand remained alive when it surrendered to them. Perhaps an equal number might have fled before it was closely invested, and something under thirty thousand men might have fallen by the sword of the enemy ; the rest, in number nearly four hundred thousand souls, of every age and sex, perished by the lingering death of famine.

“ On the twenty-first day of October, the Shah, attended by all his court, clad in deep mourning, walked on foot through the streets of Ispahan, and addressing the remaining people, bewailed the misery they had endured from his unfortunate reign ; endeavoured to comfort them with hopes of greater happiness under another ruler, and took an affectionate leave of them as his children. No eye was dry while the meek and gentle king, the last of his noble race, thus bowed his head to destiny, and bade farewell to his people. They knew that in all they had suffered at his hand, his head was more to be blamed than his heart ; that though his ministers were evil and oppressive, the king himself was just and humane ; they felt that his misfortunes were greater than his faults. Gaunt with famine and haggard

as they were with misery, they forgot their own wretchedness for the time, and bitterly lamented the fate of a monarch who had been their ruler for eight-and-twenty years.

"Next day, the melancholy procession left Ispahan for the Affghaun camp, where the monarch resigned his crown and dignity to the conqueror, who, rendered insolent by success, would receive it from no hand but that of the unfortunate king. 'Son,' said the humbled monarch, as he placed the royal plume in the turban of the Affghaun, 'the sovereign of the universe has willed that I shall reign no longer, and has chosen thee to succeed me on the throne of Persia. I willingly resign to thee the crown, and may thy reign be prosperous!' Thus ended the reign of the Sooffees,—an era the most brilliant in the history of Iran,—after they had swayed its sceptre for more than two hundred years.

"During the earlier period of the siege, and the commencement of the scarcity, I had watched with the most tender anxiety over the safety of my mistress; and apprehending to a certain extent what was likely to happen—for once in India I had witnessed somewhat of the horrors of a famine—I secretly laid in stores of grain, and such other provisions as were likely to be useful during a long blockade; for I never anticipated the fall of the city, although I did think it probable that the siege might continue for many months to come. By these means, when food became scarce and bad, I was enabled to send supplies of better quality for the use of Zoolfah and her father.

"I discovered about this time, by means of the nurse, that doubts were now entertained of the safety of my mistress' intended husband; nothing had been heard of him for many months; and besides, his patron, the Aitemad-udoulut had lost something of his power, and the value of the match was thus greatly diminished in the Cazee's eyes. These circumstances induced me to open a negotiation with the old gentleman, who, now in miserable health, and worn out with anxiety of mind, as well as bodily disease, was less unwilling to listen, when he found that I was rich, and willing to take his daughter on the same favourable terms as her former suitor.

"In short, I was introduced to the old man as his son-in-law, and, before the famine became so fatal as it afterwards did, I had the delight of receiving the lovely Zoofah as my wife. They were disastrous times to marry in!—the pomp and ceremonies observed on such occasions were necessarily much curtailed. It would not, indeed, have been decent to express our joy by mirth and feasting, when many were already starving around us.

"It now became my duty, as it had before been my delight, to provide in every possible way for the comfort of my dear Zoofah. I spared, you may believe, no expense in procuring delicacies for her while these were to be had; and the precautions I had taken secured a moderate supply of wholesome food, when others were forced to support themselves on all that was loathsome. Such was the misery I saw around me, that I think no motive less powerful than that of preserving my wife and her father could have given me resolution to withhold my stores from the general need. Even to his family I was forced to deal them out sparingly; but the aid was important, and the old man felt it to be so, for, as his illness increased and his end approached, he assured me that I should not lose by it. When he died, which was more than a month before the termination of the siege, he discovered to me the secret repositories of his money; telling me that I, of all his children or sons-in-law, had behaved to him as to a father, and mine therefore should be his wealth. It was of little use to me; I had far more than I wanted already; but to guard against contingencies, I made such arrangements as seemed expedient for regulating his affairs. His establishment was broken up, and the house shut; such women as still remained in his apartments—and he was much too frugal to keep more than were required for his domestic duties—were transferred to my own house.

"The bulk of his fortune was divided into shares, corresponding with the number of his family, to whom, after the perils of the times should be passed, I meant to communicate the event. But few were ever claimed; famine, misery, or accident, had probably cut the greater number of them off.

"But now arrived the most painful period of all. Care-

ful and economical as I had been of my provisions, they fell short of the demands upon them ; and it was no longer possible to support my household. Some of my servants knew of my concealed stores, and furious, poor wretches ! that they could no longer be supplied from them, they noised the matter abroad ; the ravenous crowd broke into my house, and seized on all they could find.

“ Fortunately, a small portion still escaped their search, and this I determined to preserve at every hazard for the support of my wife. It was a dreadful scene ; my house, which till then had been blessed with comparative plenty, became, like others, the abode of famine and of death ; those hitherto accustomed to wholesome nourishment, felt the change to want or noxious food more sensibly and fatally than they who had been gradually broken in from the first. The women drooped and died ; the men left the house to seek for food, and supported themselves on the carcasses in the streets, or were added to their number. For my part, trembling for the fate of that object in which my soul was bound up, I seldom dared to quit her presence, but watched over her health and comfort with a tenderness and anxiety proportioned to the peril and the love I bore her. But at times I was forced to steal out, to seek, if possible, some better food than I had left, and which, by bribing high the servants of the Shah, I now and then was happy enough to procure. I scarcely ventured myself to touch the scanty pittance that was left me, but, sensible how much the life of Zoolfah depended upon mine, I supported myself on the coarsest things I could get, resisting all her entreaties to share her wretched meals, or seeming to share them with her, only to reserve a portion for herself, when it might not otherwise be had.

“ But in spite of all my care and all my efforts, health could not be preserved in such circumstances. The beauty and plumpness of my wife soon gave way ; the very air, salubrious as that of Ispahan is proverbially said to be, became noisome and tainted by the putrifying corpses ; and the horrid stillness of our house, where now at length we two alone remained alive, oppressed her spirits and destroyed her health. She became languid and emaciated ; the apprehension of seeing the only being I

cared for in the universe, perish before my eyes like the multitudes around me, haunted me day and night. My own health at last gave way. I was reduced to a walking skeleton, and my strength failed so much that it was with difficulty I could rise from the floor, to perform such services as were indispensable for Zoolfah and myself.

"You, my kind preserver, may have seen the horrors of war and rapine in their most dreadful shapes—you may have lost friends and companions by the sword, and seen mothers and their infants murdered by the same blow :—but, believe me, if you have not witnessed the effects of famine ;—if you have not seen the slow consuming hand of want, wasting thousands, one by one, around you ;—if you have not seen—as I have—the streets strewed with their ghastly corpses, and marked the living preying on the dead ;—if you have not watched the lingering decay, the painful, protracted dissolution of all you loved and cherished upon earth ;—then be assured you are yet unacquainted with the fulness of misery which the ambition or the wickedness of man can pour upon his brethren !

"Thanks be to Allah ! the worst misfortune did not then overwhelm me. At the very moment when we could have held out no longer, the Shah resigned his diadem ; the Affghauns took possession of the city, and with them, for a time, once more entered plenty and peace.*

"That same day, food became abundant ; and the miserable remains of the population were more in danger of suffering from abundance than from want. The streets by degrees were cleansed from their pollution, and the dead were interred ; but the heaps of carcases that choked the stream, and encumbered the banks of the Zeinderood, could not so easily be disposed of, and long tainted the air and the waters of that river."

* Father Kruzinski says that on the very day that Sultaun Meer Mahmood entered the city, bread became so plentiful that the same quantity which the day before would have cost two hundred crowns, might then have been had for one.

CHAPTER V.

THE YOUNG MERCHANT'S STORY CONCLUDED.

"THE early conduct of the conqueror was marked by so much justice and wisdom, that the people, wearied out with horrors, began to hope for some repose; and many augured highly of a monarch who had commenced his reign so well. Desirous, in all probability, to gain the confidence of his new subjects, he retained in their respective employments most of the principal officers of state, and functionaries who had enjoyed a fair character; but, resolved likewise to secure their fidelity, he joined with each individual, a confidential servant of his own nation. One principal office alone—that of Dewanbeggee—the head of the judicial department, he bestowed upon an Affghaun, and this honest foreigner discharged the duties of his office so well that the Persians themselves were astonished at his ability and disinterested integrity.

"One act, and that among the first of his reign, was highly popular. The nest of traitors who had betrayed their late sovereign, were seized and executed with all possible indignity, as guilty of high treason. 'He never could place confidence,' observed the conqueror, 'in men who had betrayed their master in his hour of need.' The Wullee of Arabia was not put to death, it is true—perhaps some oath or promise was the cause of this singular reserve in his favour. But his property was confiscated, and he himself condemned to perpetual imprisonment.

"Thus peacefully and happily passed on the two first months of Meer Mahmood's reign;—the joy of the people knew no bounds; they returned to their usual occupations, the long deserted bazaars were once more frequented, and the city began to be repeopled. But it was a deceitful calm, the precursor of an awful storm.

"Meer Mahmood, naturally of a jealous, suspicious nature, had viewed with great alarm the flight of Prince Tahmaseb Meerza, the only son of Shah Hoossein's family who had not fallen into his power. He resolved to spare no pains to get hold of him also, and sent a force for this purpose to surprise Casveen, the former capital of the

empire, where at this time the Prince resided. Tahmaseb escaped, but the place surrendered to Amaun Oollah, the Affghaun general.

"A month, however, had scarcely passed, when, driven to desperation by the avarice and severe exactions of Amaun Oollah, a conspiracy was formed, which terminated in a revolt, so successful that the greater part of the Affghauns were cut to pieces before the rest were aware of any disturbance, and their general, severely wounded, along with the remains of his troops, fled back in terror to Ispahan.

"This event produced a dreadful revolution in the disposition of Mahmood. Although he was brave and enterprising in the field, it is certain he possessed but little firmness of mind in political difficulties. When he looked around him and observed the immense disproportion that existed between his own troops and the number of Persians in Ispahan alone, he was seized with uncontrollable terror, and, as the only means of removing its cause, he adopted the horrid resolution of lessening the numbers of those he dreaded, by a general massacre.

"With this intention, he took the precaution of lulling suspicion to rest by announcing publicly a pretended victory, and the capture of prince Tahmaseb. Illuminations and other public rejoicings were directed to be prepared, and these served as a pretext for doubling the guards at each gate, preventing the entrance of all strangers, and taking other precautions of a similar nature. Selecting then his victims, and deeming it matter of policy to deprive the people of their chiefs, he invited to a public entertainment which he had announced, all the ministers, khans, and public functionaries then in Ispahan. They all readily obeyed the call, and, not having the slightest suspicion of treachery, brought along with them several of their children, assembling to the number of three hundred. Meer Mahmood received these unfortunate victims with every appearance of cordiality, and they sat down among the Affghaun chiefs to partake of the feast that was set before them. But no sooner were they thus engaged, than a number of the usurper's guards, who were

concealed within the palace, rushed out, and falling upon them, hewed them in pieces.

It was a horrible sight!—The wretched men, astonished at the tumult and the violence, sat thunderstruck for a moment; but when they saw the scymetars flashing over their heads, and their companions falling fast around them, they attempted to escape; the gates, however, were secured, and one after another they were butchered, even when pleading at the feet of the tyrant.

“I had gone as a spectator to see the feast; and, familiar with horrid sights as I had been, I never shall forget the shrieks that rose from the miserable creatures. Some beautiful youths among them were slaughtered as they clung about their murderers’ knees;—but even the very Affghauns themselves sickened at the fate of one lovely boy, a son of the Prince of Georgia: relying on the protection of an Affghaun lord who had adopted him as his son, the child flew to him at the first commencement of the uproar; but the perpetrators of this infernal massacre, tearing him from the knees of his adopted father, and from the chiefs of their own nation who wished to save him, butchered him while screaming for mercy and convulsively grasping a tree which he clung to as they dragged him along the ground.

“Still more barbarous, if possible, were the means which the tyrant employed to secure himself from the consequences of his perfidy. Many of the sons of the murdered nobles were educated along with those of other Persian and Georgian chiefs, in one of the principal medressahs* of the place. Seizing these youths, whose tender age and beauty might have pleaded for them with any one but a tyrant like Mahmood,—he ordered them to be turned loose in the open plain, and permitted them to run for their lives, while his armed Affghauns chased them like beasts of game, and slaughtered them as they overtook them. The bodies of all his victims were then thrown into the Maidaun Shahee,† where they lay naked and exposed to public view.

* Colleges.

† A large and magnificent square in front of the palace gate.

"If the design of Meer Mahmood was to break the spirit of the people and to terrify them into abject submission by those atrocities, as seems most probable, he succeeded to his fullest wish. Horror-struck with what they had witnessed, and totally without a leader, they never dreamt of resistance, but ran and hid themselves, not knowing where the slaughter was to end.

"It might be supposed that suspicion would be fully aroused in the mind of every Persian by so black an act of treachery; yet this was not the case. After the abdication of Shah Hoossein, the usurper had received into his pay three thousand picked men of the late king's guards, who, along with others of the Persian soldiers, had taken an oath of fidelity, and were incorporated with his army. These men saw no cause to dread any hostile act on the part of their new employer. They could not be aware that he mistrusted them, and that therefore they were standing on the brink of a precipice. On the contrary, they were sensible that he had bestowed additional marks of favour upon them, as if he had been desirous to secure their attachment to his person; and they received with satisfaction an intimation that their new sovereign intended to present them with a bounty, and to feast them on pillow, in one of the large squares of the palace. They assembled there accordingly, and, as it is not customary for any one except the guards on duty, to retain their arms in this part of the royal residence, the order to pile their weapons in a corner of the square excited no suspicion. But no sooner were they seated, than a large body of armed Affghauns poured in from all quarters, secured the arms, and unrelentingly cut to pieces the whole of these unfortunate and unsuspecting men.

"The tyrant now threw off the mask, and a slaughter was begun among the inhabitants of Ispahan, that rivalled in the number of its victims the effects of the famine from which the city had but just recovered. He pretended to have received information of a conspiracy similar to that which had broken out at Casveen, and he sent forth his soldiers in troops, with orders to put to death every one whom they should discover to be in any wise concerned in it. This was, in other words, commanding a general

massacre, and well were his orders fulfilled ;—these ruffians, once let loose, spared neither age nor sex ; they entered every house at will, tortured such persons as they believed to be possessed of money, and put to death every one who made the least resistance, or who had ever been known to bear arms. Again the streets were heaped with carcasses, and the houses were once more deserted : for fifteen days the only sounds to be heard in the city were the shouts and the halloos of the murderers, the peal of muskets, the blows of swords, and the shrieks of the dying wretches that were slain. Such was the abject despondency of the people, that they offered not the smallest resistance to their executioners, and single Affghauns might be seen leading a string of three or four Persians to slaughter like beasts to the shambles. Thousands fled from the place, and after a while the tyrant did not seek to retain them, for he thought that in weakening the strength of the capital lay his only safety.

“ And now I come to relate my own heavy share in this general calamity : and but that faint hopes are still left me of recovering my loss, I should curse the unwelcome lenity of my fate, that preserved my life when thousands were falling around me.

“ During the greater part of this tragedy I confined myself with my wife to a retired part of our house, which hitherto had escaped unobserved by the ruffians ; but, driven at last by want, I ventured out one night in quest of food to support us. Clad in poor apparel, I stole towards the bazaars, but they were all deserted, and many of the shops were broken open and plundered. I then bethought me of an obscure person whom I had assisted to set up a small shop in a distant quarter of the city, where he sold a little corn, parched peas, greens, and such articles as the poorer classes make use of. It was a far way off, and my mind misgave me sorely : but how could I return home without food ?

“ I crept along the most unfrequented by-lanes, and often heard at a distance the shouts of those who pursued, and the cries of them who fell ; but I succeeded at length in reaching the shop unmolested. It was long before I could ascertain whether or not its owner was within, and

still longer ere, reassured by my name and my voice, he ventured to admit me. At length, cautiously opening the door, he refastened it, and retreating by a little passage to the back part of the house, hid himself and me behind a curtain before he would inquire what I wanted.

"He readily supplied me with what he had, and I was returning with all the speed I could; when, passing through a narrow lane, I heard a bustle and shouting, the glare of several torches flashed on my eye, and a number of men who bore them, suddenly turning the corner, came rapidly towards me. They were a party of Affghauns, who were dragging and driving along a string of a dozen or fourteen Persians, with their arms tied behind them, and whose dress showed many symptoms of violence.

"Appalled at this ill-timed rencounter, I would fain have shrunk back and retreated, but it was too late; the lane through which I had come had no side openings to escape by; I was observed, and a shot whistling past my ear, told me what fate I had to expect if I did not obey their order to stand.

"My assurances that I was a poor man returning with a little food to his family, were treated with contempt, but they did not appear to be in the mood for murder: They stripped off my girdle, bound my arms with it like the rest, and pushing at me with the point of a sword, urged me forward. 'In the name of God!' cried I, 'let me carry these victuals to my starving wife, and then I will go with you to death if you will.' 'Hoh! hoh! your wife,' cried they, 'what! is she young and handsome? Come, let us see her; though, women are so plenty with us now, she must be a rare one to be worth our pains—come, where is your house?' This unfeeling answer restored me to recollection: 'Better leave poor Zoolfah to the care of Providence, starving though she be,' said I internally, 'than expose her to the outrage of such villains.'—'Lead on,' cried I, 'where you please; I am prepared for death, if death it is to be.'

"With another savage laugh they again hurried us forward. When we reached the bazaars and larger streets, we met several parties who were bound, as it seemed, on a like errand with ours; they cheered each other as they

passed,—‘Hah! hah! Eussufzey!—Hah! hah! Ghoree!—Hoh, Poyundeh!—Good luck to the Affghauns!’ and such like exclamations were interchanged as we met, and the watch-words of the guards were given and returned. At length they led us to the palace, and thrust us still bound into a sort of guard-room, where we were left to our meditations.

“I now felt assured the morrow would see us led to execution: indeed, the only wonder was why we had not been put to death upon the spot:—but this was soon explained; for when we began to talk with one another, and inquire into the circumstances of our several apprehensions, I discovered that the whole of my fellow-prisoners were persons, by repute, among the richest inhabitants that yet remained in Ispahan, and it was sufficiently obvious that they had been selected to be tortured in the presence of Mahmood, for the purpose of extorting from them their secret treasure.

“As this conviction forced itself upon our minds, we already might be said to suffer the tortures which were preparing for us. The anticipations of this night were fearful, but the human mind, like the human frame, can only take in a certain portion of suffering;—by degrees this fever of misery and apprehension subsided, with some into sullen calmness, with others into pious resignation. For my part, I resolved to suffer and die in silence, rather than utter a word that might expose my helpless wife to the tender mercies of such savages.

“We passed a heavy night, in truth; but long and dreary as it was, we had no cause to wish for a dawn which was to light us to tortures and to death. To me, however, a ray of hope came with the light of morning; for, among the soldiers who then entered our prison, I beheld the face of one whom I instantly recognized. It was a Dehbashee* in one of the bands about the tyrant’s person, whose conduct on a certain occasion, immediately after the entrance of the Affghauns into the city, had strongly excited my admiration.

“In passing on that occasion through a street that led

* An officer commanding ten men.

towards my dwelling, I overtook two veiled females, who were picking their way with trembling steps among the bodies, just as two Affghauns came up and accosted them, —‘ Women, by the mother of Omar!’ cried one. ‘ And young and pretty, no doubt,’ added the other with an oath, seizing hold of the lesser female, and endeavouring to tear off her veil. —‘ Gentlemen,’ exclaimed the elder woman, at once removing her veil, and displaying her fine though aged features, ‘ for the love of God! for the sake of the blessed Prophet, harm not my child! I am a widow; my husband and two sons lie among these bodies!—there is no one left me but this helpless girl. I seek but a morsel of food to sustain life, and did not dare to leave her unprotected in my lonely dwelling. Do not snatch from me what famine and misery have spared! By the chaste mother who bore you, do not deprive me of my innocent child!’ The ruffian, unmoved, would have still persisted, but Sheer Oollah, so was the Dehbashee named, pulled him away from the girl. ‘ Let the woman alone, Poordil,’ said he; ‘ do not put a finger on her daughter! Go, mother,—go, in God’s name! we are not all savages; and here, take this: here are some dinars to help you.’ My heart swelled at this sight, with a pleasure to which it had long been a stranger. I went up to the man—I could not help it—‘ You shall be no loser by your humanity, my friend,’ said I; ‘ take this for your kindness to that unfortunate.’ And I put into his hands ten sequins, which I had taken out with me to purchase provision. He looked hard at the money, and then at me:—‘ Persian,’ said he, ‘ you are generous—may God send you increase of wealth! the day may come when a friend may be of use, and if Sheer Oollah be near, you shall not want one.’

“ This was the man who now entered our prison. I had never seen him since, but I remembered his features well. While the soldiers were roughly preparing to lead us away, I took an opportunity, as he passed me, gently to utter his name.—‘ Who the devil calls?’ demanded he somewhat roughly. But no sooner had he got a full view of my face than, starting back a step, ‘ Allah-il-ullah!’ exclaimed he in an under-voice, ‘ is it then so!—is the time come then?—I thought it would—I thought as

much!"—and calling to his comrades, "Hollah, Obeid Oollah! whom have we got here? Why, this is none of those we want! This is a poor devil not worth a tomaun, as you may see by his clothes: I know him well; he once gave me a drink of buttermilk when I was much in want of it, and I will not have him hurt. I take it on myself to let him go."—"Let him go?" grumbled Obeid Oollah, "you had better let that alone; our master does not let many Persians go, when he has once got them in his gripe. The man may be as little worth as you say, but when his head is off, it is one dog the less—Come, carry him along, do."—"By the head of Mahomed! and by the beard of Omar!—and that is two good oaths—I swear that not a hair of his head shall be touched!" cried Sheer Oollah; "what, man! is blood so scarce that you can't let me have the life of one poor devil who did me a service? Come, come, comrade! leave him to me; no blame shall rest on you, even if you will insist on the chief's being told of it; but you need not, unless you like: there are enough here to keep him busy for this morning."

"No more was said; Sheer Oollah unbound my arms, and leading me himself through all the gates of the palace, said, 'God be with thee, Persian! quit this place speedily; and if thou meetest any of our tribe, show them this dagger, cry, Shooker Oollah Mahmood Ghiljee! and they will let thee pass. Keep quiet in thy house—these days of terror cannot last much longer; the lion is nearly glutted: I thank Allah that I was in the way to succour thee, for thou hast a kind heart.' No more passed; I pressed his hand to my breast; took the dagger, which I still preserve, and hurried homeward.

"I reached my house unquestioned, but was startled to find the door standing open; and my heart sank within me as I traversed its silent chambers. No sound met my ear as I passed through the underoon; and on reaching the door which led to my secret apartment, I found its curtain torn violently from its fastenings, and the room itself empty. I was thunderstruck—a cold dew stood upon my brow, and my limbs trembled so that I could hardly stand!—I called upon Zoolfah, but no answer was returned—I repeated the call again and again, but no re-

ply was given. 'Merciful Allah!' cried I almost distracted, 'what can have happened!—what can have become of her!'—but the echo of my own words was the only sound I heard.

"I ran through all the apartments, but they were empty; and I now perceived that some of the furniture had been carried off, and some private keeping places and chests of clothes broken open. Some of my wife's clothes were scattered about in the private room, and a bracelet she used to wear, lay broken in a corner: these were fatal proofs that violence had been used—she had been forcibly carried off, beyond all doubt! I threw myself upon the ground, and wept in bitter anguish.

"I did not long indulge this unprofitable mood—it was not the way to regain my lost Zoofah.—Quitting the house, I once more roamed about the streets, gazing on the few females that were to be seen there, with the vague hope of finding her among them. How I escaped the bloodhounds that still prowled about, I can scarce tell; unless it was that the misery which they traced in my appearance, gave them no reason to believe me worth their attention; for murders and arrests were by this time confined to the wealthy—the poor had all been put to death or had fled.

"Still I had laid no plan;—what indeed was to be done?—how in this vast and desolate city, where none but ravishers and murderers could walk abroad in safety, could I hope to recover the treasure I had lost?—what chance was there of her being safe?—how was I to discover the slightest trace of her ravishers? Not a friend had I to consult—not a creature whose assistance I could implore:—I knew not where to find the kind Sheer Oollah—to seek him at the palace would be to run my head into the lion's mouth; and what after all could he have done for me? For three days I wandered thus about, haggard and forlorn, retiring each night to my desolate home, when darkness and absolute exhaustion put an end to my bootless wanderings; and I devoured whatever food came in my way, although I loathed its very sight, that my strength might not fail me in the pursuit of my wretched wife.

"As I was leaving the house on the fourth morning, I observed a man in the outer passage advancing cautiously towards me :—it was Yussuff, one of the oldest and most faithful of my slaves, the same that is now with me here. He alone, of all my people, had survived the famine, and remained with me after it had ceased. He started at seeing me, but it was a start of pleasure as well as of surprise ; for he thought that I had been murdered like the thousands around us.

" 'Yussuff,' demanded I, interrupting his passionate exclamations, 'where is your mistress? where is my wife? Have you seen her? Speak, for Heaven's sake!' —'Alas! Sir,' replied he, 'I have little good to tell :—would to God it were otherwise ; but I fear your lady is lost to you for ever!'

"To shorten my tale,—I found from Yussuff, that on the night when I went out to seek provisions, he, who was our only servant, but who being pursued to a hiding-place in a distant quarter by a party of Affghauns, had not been with us for many days before, had returned to the house, just in time to see it entered by certain soldiers in quest of its master. The noise they made in entering, had attracted the notice of my wife ; who, only thinking of my return, had lifted the curtain of the secret door to welcome me : the ruffians caught a glimpse of her as they unceremoniously traversed the underoon, and giving chase, caught her, and carried her off in spite of her tears and cries, leaving the house in the condition in which I found it.

"Yussuff, who unobserved had witnessed this scene, followed the party at a distance, until they met with an officer, who, observing my wife, desired them to carry her immediately to a house which had once belonged to a noble of Persia, but which now was inhabited by Nasser Oollah, one of Mahmood's generals. Having seen them enter here, Yussuff thought only of seeking and acquainting me with all that had happened ; but not finding me returned, he concluded that I had undergone the common fate, and had been murdered by command of Mahmood or his officers.

"Still anxious about the fate of his mistress, although

quite uncertain how to pursue any farther inquiries, he watched the gates of the house in which she was confined; and the very next day was delighted at being accosted by an old female slave, who recognized him, and who belonged at this time to the family of Nasser Oollah. From her he learned, that her master, unwilling to risk the loss of his new acquisition, upon whom he set a high value, had lost no time in sending her away from Ispahan, escorted by a small party of his own followers. This was all the old woman could tell; and Yussuff, now quite at fault, had returned to the house, in order to put things in a better state of security, and then to make another effort to ascertain my fate.

"I listened to his narrative without offering once to interrupt him; I could not speak. Exhausted as I had been with previous suffering, the shock which so completely destroyed all my hopes, now quite overwhelmed me; my head reeled, and I fell to the ground insensible to all about me. On recovering my senses, I found myself in my private apartment, watched over only by Yussuff, who having conveyed me to my couch, and exhausted his skill to bring me to myself, took advantage of my stupor to shut up the house, and take precautions against any more surprises from without.

"I continued many days in a state verging upon death, watched by this faithful creature, to whose care on this occasion my life is entirely due. When I recovered my scattered senses, the recollection of my irreparable loss flashed on my mind like a horrid dream that had oppressed me in sleep:—and it was not until returning health had restored to me the full powers of my mind, that I comprehended all the bitterness of my misfortune. But even then it came over me with moderated violence—I could think and reason; and though no course of conduct occurred to me that afforded the least probability of success, the extreme of despondency had passed away, and I no longer suffered myself to relapse into a supine extravagance of grief.

"By the time I was able to move about again, the city, once more depopulated, was left in comparative tranquillity. The executions had ceased, and Mahmood, satiated

with blood, reigned in sullen security over the solitude he had created. It would have been worse than useless to appeal to the justice or mercy of such remorseless tyrants as our conquerors ; so I resolved to trust to other means for discovering and regaining my unfortunate Zoolfah. I lavished money on agents both male and female, whom I sent into every part of Persia to search among the various harems, particularly in those of the Affghauns, and to learn whether any female resembling my wife was to be heard of among them. I continued my researches in the town, and remained there for some months, in order to receive accounts from my various emissaries. But all was in vain ;—my hopes were often raised, but as often disappointed ; and I had begun totally to despair, when one day a paper, rolled up in the form of a letter, but without either seal or superscription, was handed to a servant for me by a porter, who merely said that it required no answer, and went his way. It contained but these words—‘ Your wife is safe—her honour is unsullied ; and it will depend upon yourself to have her soon restored to you.’

“ You may conceive with what transport I read these lines—how hope was revived by them ; but it was only the prelude to more bitter disappointment ; for, after waiting in vain for a repetition of the intelligence, my most active inquiries, supported with all the sums which I lavished for intelligence, failed to discover the writer of the billet, or the porter who brought it to me ; so that, although I was somewhat reassured respecting the fate of my unfortunate Zoolfah, she remained as much lost to me as ever.

“ A circumstance too trivial to mention, led me to think that I might be more fortunate in my inquiries at Casveen ; and thither I removed for a while. But I met with no better success there, and the hope which led me to this place, was perhaps as vain. One day, while walking pensively along, in front of the great mosque at Casveen, a wandering Dervish of singular appearance, besought me to give him alms in a tone of voice that fixed my attention. Struck with his manner, I gave him a few pieces of silver, entreating him to pray that I might find what I sought.

'My son,' replied he, 'the life of man is a journey of misery and woe;—the decrees of Allah are fulfilled, though puny mortals wound themselves in resisting them : but a charitable deed never loses its reward. If thou wouldst have tidings of that which is lost, repair to the holiest shrine of the East ; let thy prayers ascend to Allah from before it, let its true servants be comforted by thy alms, and await the will of the Most High !'

"A falling man will catch at shadows, and he who lingers under a tedious malady will seek relief in changing his physician. The Dervish's reply might not be very distinct or consolatory, but I sought to wrest it into a dark promise of success. The tomb of Imaum Reza was the holiest shrine of the East,—Mushed was a new scene, the reports of my emissaries might come to me there as well as at Casveen or Ispahan,—I was sick of both these places, so I resolved on a visit to Mushed, where I arrived six months ago. I procured this house, which is retired and little subject to observation, and fitted it up as you see. The troubles around did not affect me much ;—so that I had enough to support life in peaceable retirement, I cared little who might possess the city ; and here I resolved to continue until something might occur to renew the faint hopes of recovering my beloved Zoolfah, or to extinguish them entirely.

"I have been regular in offering up prayers at the holy shrine, and not, as I think, deficient in relieving the wants of the servants who attend, or the pilgrims who flock to it from every quarter of Persia ; but as yet no light has broken in upon my darkness, no oil has been poured upon the lamp of my hopes. It was on my return from my customary service in the Durgah, that I was assaulted by the ruffians from whose violence your opportune and prompt assistance so fortunately delivered me ; and I shall ever remain your grateful debtor for so essential a service."

CHAPTER VI.

THE JEW.

THE young merchant here ended his story ; and after thanking him for the pleasure which his narration of it had given me, I remained for a while absorbed in the reflections it gave rise to. That spirit of enterprize which was always alive within me, had been powerfully excited by it ; and, overlooking all the inconveniences and perils of a traveller's life, I felt for the time as if happiness was only to be found in wandering from one place to another in search of adventures. Fancy took the reins, and pictured the delight of roaming uncontrolled from country to country, and from clime to clime, as inclination might prompt. But the momentary intoxication passed off—I remembered my actual situation ;—the enlisted soldier of a great leader had surely scope sufficient for his enterprize—the favoured lover of two beautiful women had little cause to sigh for farther happiness,—at least so thought I at this time. The career before me was fair and fortunate, or it lay with myself to make it so.—“Yes,” said I mentally, “I will imitate the prudence of my new friend, and seek to make the best of opportunity, as he has done !”

Meerza Aboo Talib watched me as I sat absorbed in these reflections, and smiled at the expression of enthusiasm which flitted over my countenance, as if he read the thoughts which had excited it :—we conversed for some time longer about his adventures,—on the various dangers he had encountered, on the strange turns of fortune he had experienced, and on the mysterious fate of his unhappy Zoolfah,—until it was full time to retire ; and when I rose to do so, he presented me with another purse, equal in value to the former. I sought to excuse myself from accepting this fresh mark of his liberality ; but, addressing me with an air of respectful affection,—“Do not, my dear friend—if you will permit me to call you by that name—do not refuse me this gratification. From all you have learned of my story you must be quite aware, that money can be of little value to me except in as far as it enables me to indulge my inclination, and assist the few friends I

may meet with in my journey through life. Permit me to say that I have conceived a great affection and esteem for you :—a soldier is seldom overburdened with riches ; promise me then, that whenever you may require a supply, you will frankly apply to me for it. By doing this, you will gratify me much, and enable me to express in some degree the gratitude I feel towards you as my deliverer.”

The arguments of Aboo Talib were persuasive in themselves, and I am ashamed to say that my necessities rendered his generous offers a temptation not easily to be resisted. I eyed the heavy purse with a longing look ; but the recollection of my reproaches on this subject to Fouje Allee, flashed on my mind, and, with an effort of returning virtue, I refused the proffered gift. But the mortification of my friend at my refusal, and the repeated demands of Fatimah, together with the career of folly which I still pursued in other quarters, combined to overwhelm my fortitude ; and though I could not stoop to take advantage of my friend's liberality, I compromised the matter with my conscience, by accepting as a loan what I had rejected as a gift ; trusting that some happy turn of fortune might some day enable me to repay him. The generous Aboo Talib unhesitatingly furnished me with whatever I required, and often exceeded my demands ; but his prudent spirit could not remark the extravagance of mine without alarm, and he took occasion gently to caution me upon the subject : “ I would not seek to thrust myself into your confidence, dear Ismael, and still less would I have you suppose for a moment that I lay claim to the smallest control over your actions, in consequence of the trifling assistance you may have received from me ; but I fear—for your own sake I fear—that you are hampered by some serious entanglement ; or that you have made some connexion with persons who prey upon you, and who, sooner or later, will drag you into some distressing or dangerous predicament. If this be the case—if I can in any way assist you—I beseech you do not conceal it from me ; and rely on my best services.”

How strange and inconsistent is the human heart !—I felt and acknowledged the friendly intention of this judicious remonstrance ; but it hurt my pride, and chafed a

spirit already galled by self-reproach: nor had I courage to encounter advice which I felt that I could not obey,—for I was yet too weak to break the chains of vice and folly which had so long and so fatally bound me. “Fear not for me,” said I at length, with some confusion; “I may have been heedless and foolish, but I stand in no danger: nay, I mean to be more considerate in future, and wisdom will come with experience. Be assured, that if in need of assistance, I shall not scruple to apply for it to you, my friend. Meantime, I pray you be satisfied, and let the subject rest.” He urged the point no farther; and whatever might be his opinion of my conduct, it never was expressed by any diminution of kindness towards me.

But though I succeeded in shutting the mouth of my friend, it was not so easy to stifle the reproaches of my own heart. However I might disguise it to others, I could not but feel the unworthiness, the wickedness, the disgrace, of the idle and dissipated career I was pursuing; nor was my conscience easily to be set at rest on the subject of my pecuniary transactions with my friend. I had indignantly repulsed the proposal of Fouje Allee, to turn to account the young merchant’s liberality; yet had I not been led step by step to practice something scarcely better than that meanness myself? The idea of working on his gratitude for our own advantage had shocked me when suggested by another; yet, what less than this had I in reality been guilty of myself?—for my restless and troublesome internal monitor would not be satisfied, for a moment, with the specious *salvo* of a *loan*, with which I sought to blind it. No!—I perceived and was shocked at the disgraceful course I was pursuing; but the period of repentance and reform had not yet arrived.

It was about this time that an incident occurred, which, while it left a strong and lasting impression of horror on my mind, became the means of interesting my better feelings, and diverting it in some measure from the unworthy and debasing gratifications, by which it had for some time past been so much engrossed.

In Mushed, as in many other cities of Persia, the Jews occupy a certain limited division of the city; and though they are permitted to pursue their customary occupations

in most of the other quarters, unmolested except by the usual proportion of insults and abuse bestowed upon them by the people, there are some places, and those in particular which are connected with the sacred shrine, into which they may not enter. The Sahn, a great square before the mausoleum, is held especially sacred ; and it would be death for any Jew or Christian to put his foot within its gates, although the long street and bazaar which leads from either end, is free to them as to others.

But these wretched infidels are seldom left in peaceable possession of their privileges, scanty though they are, and purchased by a heavy rate of duties and tributes, as well as by a still more oppressive system of arbitrary extortion. The jealousy, insolence, or rapacity of their rulers is constantly making fresh encroachments, and forcing them to submit to fresh sacrifices. The Moollahs are their principal oppressors : they hate and are hated by the Jews ; but want of money on the one hand, and of protection on the other, often produces an intercourse which neither party would otherwise endure.

The Moollahs are, in truth, the most numerous, and by far the most powerful class of the inhabitants of Mushed ; —a host of priests and doctors, Khadums* and teachers, flock from all quarters to its shrines and its colleges, and these again are supported by a number of disciples, pupils, and followers. But even the blind zeal and mistaken piety of the people, united to the large revenues which belong to these establishments, are insufficient to maintain these holy men, far less to support their extravagance ; for the larger proportion of them are notoriously debauched, vicious, and extravagant in their habits. To obtain the means of indulging these propensities, therefore, they have recourse without scruple to such means of extortion as fall in their way, and the Jews come in for no small share of it. Under colour of protecting these unfortunate wretches from the displeasure of the chief priests and rulers of the place, loans are exacted, which sometimes are of trifling amount, and are then generally considered in the light of premiums ; but which sometimes

* Servants of the shrine.

are carried to the length of a true mercantile transaction, in which the lender expects to be repaid at least a portion of his advance, in consideration of the favourable terms on which he has been induced to deal. It is true these transactions are considered as very hazardous, and are seldom entered into by the Jews, unless from necessity, or some very powerful temptation.

A transaction of this nature had taken place between a certain Meerza Jaffier, and a well-known Jew, called Yacoob Yahooodee. The Meerza was a person of worse than dubious character in every way; known among his companions as one addicted to the worst species of debauchery, and who lavished the large sums which he contrived to procure, upon persons of the most infamous description, his companions: but he was a relation of the Mootwullec, or superior of the Durgah, and this was a sufficient protection had he been ten times as vicious.

Yacoob Yahooodee was one of a considerable and well-known family of that nation, supposed to be wealthy, but therefore so often squeezed by the needy nobles and priests, that they bitterly complained they were reduced to beggary. Still Yacoob hung about the palace and the Medresahs, lent his coin, and took with patient forbearance the scurrilous jests and insults that were heaped upon him by the faithful and the holy; and the knowing ones said, that Yacoob would never have submitted to all this, if he did not find profitable amends in a manner that did not appear to the public.

Yacoob had lent to Meerza Jaffier a larger sum than he chose to lose, and had frequently and humbly entreated for payment in whole or in part, as the Meerza pleased. But it did not please the Meerza to pay it at all; so he warned Yacoob to come no more to seek him in his haunts, to pester him no longer—he would pay when he chose, or not at all; but if the Jew was impertinent enough to dun him again, he swore by the beard of Abraham to make him repent of it.

This was a threat that had been so often held out to Yacoob, that unhappily for himself he made light of it:—he could not believe that the Meerza meant to cheat him out of

all his money, or he thought that by importunity he should succeed in obtaining at least a part of it.

The next time he chanced to meet the Meerza, was close to the south-western gateway of the Sahn, which he was entering at the time along with five or six of his friends. Forgetting in the eagerness of his business his dangerous vicinity to the forbidden place, Yacoob, in his usual humble but persevering tone, made repeated application to the Meerza for his money. "Hear you the dog-of-a Jew!" cried he, turning to his friends and to those who had begun to collect around them,— "must a faithful, pious Mussulmaun, a descendant of the holy Prophet, submit to be insulted by a hated carrion like this? will you all suffer this?—see if he be not entering the holy Sahn! will not the gate fall and crush him to atoms?" The fatal hint was not lost on those around—the poor Jew was forcibly hustled past the forbidden barriers, and in a moment the hue and cry was raised, "Yahooodee! Yahooodee! a Jew!—a Jew in the Sahn!—sacrilege! pollution! put the accursed wretch to death! kill him! stone him!"

I was passing through the Sahn at the time, and the tumult which had attracted my attention from a distance, increased so much, that I went to ascertain its cause. The Moollahs and Khadums poured from the shrine and from the Medressahs around, like angry wasps from their nests:—before I could come up, the unfortunate Jew was down;—stones, sticks, and feet rained blows upon his carcass, he was rolled in the mud and beat upon the flags, so that before half a minute had elapsed, he had lost the form of man, and was reduced to a bloody mass of flesh and rags.

So rapidly did all this pass, that I could not have interfered had I been ever so much disposed, and it would have been totally useless if I had. But when the deed was done, and the bleeding mass before them no longer presented an object for them to vent their fury on, they drew back all panting with exertion, and looked at one another as though somewhat ashamed of their conduct. But their slumbering wrath was almost revived by a rumour at the gate of the Sahn, which reported that Abisham, the brother of Yacoob, had arrived, in terror and distress, to fetch off the

body. "Hah, hah!" cried some, "he seeks the same fate—let him come and try how he likes it—the more the better—down with the Jews! and true believers will get their money!"—"Let the carcass rot upon the dung-hill," cried another; "he shall not have a rag of it." During the gathering of this cloud of wrath I had gone to the gateway, attracted by the cries of the unfortunate Abisham, and was completely overpowered at witnessing the extremity of his distress—he tore his beard, and dashed himself upon the ground, uttering piercing shrieks, interrupted only by curses on his brother's murderers; several of his family and tribe had also accompanied him, and all were uttering the most doleful wailings. "Take courage," said I to him softly, "cease these useless cries, and I will protect you: if possible, too, you shall have your brother's body; but be silent—be all of you quiet while I go to appease yonder tumult." The man hearing me lifted up his hands and eyes with an emphatic action; their lamentations ceased, and all were still.

I now went to the crowd in the square; "Excellent, pious, and learned men!" said I, "you have done a worthy deed to-day, and the holy Imaum will, no doubt, reward you for your zeal; but remember, vengeance goes not farther than death—even Haroon* sleeps in yonder shrine, beside the holy Imaum. The wretched Jew has received his punishment: ye have his brother left to squeeze while he lives; but if ye slay him now, ye lose his wealth and your prize. Besides," added I, suddenly drawing my sword and bestriding the carcass, "I have taken a fancy to this carrion, and am resolved to have it; and if ye ask who says so, seek him in the household of Nader, who may not be disposed to enlist the Moollahs of the holy shrine among his nassackjees."†

At first they stood irresolute; but all drew back when they saw the bright weapon flash, and heard my concluding words. One by one they slunk away, and I was left with the few whom curiosity still detained about me. Persons

* Alluding to the circumstance of Haroon-al-Rasheed, the celebrated Caliph, and bitter enemy of the Sheahs, being laid in the tomb at the feet of Imaum Reza, one of their principal saints.

† Executioners.

were soon procured to remove the shapeless carcass, which the wretched brother received with the most touching bewailments, and wrapping it up in his own cloak, he and his sons bore it away between them.

A day or two after this event, while it still dwelt freshly and painfully in my memory, I chanced to be passing near the Jewish quarter of the city, and bethought me of inquiring for Abisham and his family, whose grief had so powerfully affected me. It was some time before I found it, for suspecting the business of one whose dress declared him to belong to the palace, no creature of their nation was willing to direct me to the place. At length, a man who had witnessed the scene in the Sahn, recognized me, and pointed out the house.

Nothing could exceed the wretchedness of its exterior; crumbling walls of mud and raw bricks, propped and supported with lumps of earth and pieces of wood—a miserable low-browed entrance, closed by a door of black worm-eaten planks—was all that met the eye of a passer-by; indeed the squalid wretchedness of the whole quarter was equally striking, but much of it was, no doubt, assumed for purposes of security:—the appearance of comfort would have led to suspicion of riches, and consequent exactions; and notwithstanding their wretched exterior, many of these dwellings were, doubtless, like that of my friend Abisham, decent and well ordered within.

After many precautions I was admitted within the dwelling. When the Jew understood who his visiter was, he rushed from an inner apartment, and bursting into tears threw himself at my feet, and struggled to embrace my knees; but dislike to receiving so abject a mark of humility, united to an instinctive shudder which every faithful Musulmaun is apt to feel at the touch of an unclean thing, caused me to start back. The Jew felt it, and kissing the dust where I had stood, before he rose again to his knees, “Ah, pardon a miserable man, my Lord,” said he, “a wretched Jew, whose desire to express the gratitude he feels has led him to exceed the respect he owes to one like you. But my heart was full, my Lord; I fain would have touched that hand which preserved me, and restored

to me those remains which I would have risked my worthless life to protect from farther insult."

His tears flowed afresh, and he was almost choked with the struggles he made to suppress his sobs. I could not withstand the appeal:—stretching forth both my hands, I sought to raise him, but he, seizing hold of them, carried them to his forehead, and his breast, and his lips; and, after kissing them repeatedly and convulsively, he covered his face with both his hands, and burying them on his knees, gave way to the bitterness of his grief. I was profoundly touched. In spite of my dislike to his race, there was something so different in all this from the low degrading meanness and deceit which is so universally attributed to the Jewish character, that I could not avoid regarding the individual before me with compassion and with kindness, whatever might be the faults of his nation.

"Ah! my Lord," said Abisham, after he had a little recovered himself, "you cannot know the value of the benefit you have rendered to your unfortunate servant; you cannot know the love I bore to him who is gone: persecuted, degraded as our nation is, we have little left us but the love of kindred—and he was more than kindred to me! In all the calamities and trials that have fallen upon our house, he was my comfort and support; his cheerful mind and unfailing love was my stay, when without it, I must have sunk in my grief—he was my only brother—and now, miserable man! how can I live without him!"

Tears and extreme agitation interrupted his voice as he spoke. I tried to offer a few words of consolation, but it would not do; my own voice was troubled, and I knew not what to say. I asked him if there was any thing in which I could still serve him; but he shook his head. "My Lord must see the orphans, whose father —" He stopped abruptly, and rushed into the inner room, from whence in a little time he returned, leading four beautiful children. My heart warmed to them all, as I kissed them. One, a little girl, of six years old, was lovely as a daughter of the Peris; her innocent beauty brought visions of my own childhood, and of those I

loved then, to my mind. I could have taken the little creature to my heart, and kept her there for ever. The Jew, now convulsively embracing them, turned to me, and spake with a still troubled voice :—" These are the children of my brother—they are now mine, and while I live, they will not be entirely destitute of protection—but I may die ;—alas ! what but death in all its horrid shapes awaits us wretched Jews !—would that some one, more powerful than I, could be induced to look upon them with a favourable eye—one whose influence might avail against the power of the wicked and unfeeling, when I may be at rest in the tomb of my fathers ! Oh, noble Sir, if the humane consideration you showed to the dust of the parent, might but be continued to his offspring, his brother would die in peace !" —The appeal was powerful, though it was made to one possessed of small ability. I dared not charge myself directly with the care of this unhappy family, but I could not withhold from the miserable man a promise of such support as I could render in case of need. " Jew," said I, " I am young, and a soldier ; subject entirely to the authority of others ; I have nothing in my own power, and my stay in Mushed may not be long. I dare not promise that which I may never be enabled to perform ; but if Ismael, the servant of Nader, should hear that thou, or any of these children, were in distress, such aid as he can bring shall never be wanting to their deliverance : seek him, when such may be required, at the Palace, among the Gholams of Nader."

" May the blessing of Allah increase your prosperity for ever, my Lord !—you have bound up the broken heart of your slave !—And now, noble Ismael, you will not refuse one more request from a poor Jew :—see this emerald signet, it is of the purest lustre, and without flaw or stain ; a richer was never taken from the mines of India ;—and see ! mysterious characters engraved upon it—the name of Allah, the God of the Mussulmaun as well as of the Jew, was written there before the coming of thy Prophet, for it is an ancient gem : valuable in itself, it is esteemed by us a talisman of rare virtue, and powerful to protect its wearer from many dangers. It is known to many of our race, and, if your fate should lead you into

distant countries, and you should meet with any of my kindred who are scattered abroad, this may do you service—it will ensure such aid as they can give; and if you inform them of the means by which it came into your possession, there is none of them who will not gratefully acknowledge the good deed you have done to Abisham of Mushed.

“Behold, too, here is gold; of it we have enough:—alas! of what value are riches, when life is not secure from hour to hour! To amass them is the Jew’s trade; but dear does he pay, and little does he enjoy them. Accept from the hands of thy servant that which may assist in procuring the pleasures or indulgences suited to your age and rank; and should you require a farther supply, do not scruple to seek it from Abisham the Jew.”

The degrading consequences of my wasteful extravagance, I fear, would at another time have gone far to silence what scruples I might have entertained at relieving the Jew of a part of his wealth; but, fortunately for my credit, my feelings had been too highly excited to relapse so immediately into a mean and grovelling strain. “Jew,” said I, “the aid which it has been my lot to render thee, thou art heartily welcome to:—I rejoice in having been at hand to lend it; but I cannot sell my services, nor receive a recompense for that which was voluntarily given. Keep thy gold,—I cannot take it: but for thy sake, for that of this lovely child, and in pledge that I will protect her so far as I am able, I receive thy signet ring. Some future day I may challenge the remembrance of thee, or of thy family, in virtue of this token.”

The Jew, surprised, no doubt, at a circumstance so unusual as that of a soldier and a gholaum refusing money, remained silent for a while, looking at me with an air of amazement. When he recovered his speech, he urged me with all his eloquence to satisfy his feelings in some degree by accepting his proffered purse; but I was firm in my refusal, and in order, if possible, to divert the poor man’s mind from the immediate subject of his distress, I made some inquiry regarding his family. “Ah, my Lord,” replied he, “ours is a short but melancholy tale; but it is one to which most Jewish houses could furnish a

parallel; for misery and persecution has been the portion of our race since the time when we were driven from the land of our fathers.

“For several ages, my ancestors, who were well known for their riches and respectability, inhabited the city of Herat. In spite of the various revolutions which that city has experienced, they still held their ground; and although, like the rest of their brethren, they were not unfrequently subjected to extortion, the Lord favoured their industry, and blessed their dealings with much gain.

“During the glorious days of the first Abbas, who encouraged and protected every thing that promoted the interests of commerce, the Jews as well as the Armenians enjoyed comparative security, and flourished accordingly. Nor, in truth, had our people much reason to complain until the reign of Solymaun, who abandoned the care of the provinces to governors, and they, seeking only to amass riches for themselves, harassed and persecuted all ranks and conditions of men, and especially the Jews and Christians.

“The governor of Herat, about forty years ago, was a cruel, unprincipled man, whose avarice was equalled only by the atrocities he committed to gratify it: Jews, Christians, or Mahometans, if suspected of being rich, were all equal sufferers. Among others, my grandfather, who then was the head of our family, in spite of the care which was taken to conceal the state of our circumstances, was taken up upon some frivolous pretence, and carried before the Khan. My ancestor was a man of firm mind and determined resolution; he saw the peril of the times, and took his measures accordingly.

“Like most of our nation, he had been a general dealer; but his principal and most profitable traffic was in jewels, which the central situation of Herat, between India and Persia, enabled him to carry on to great advantage. In these and such other precious things, therefore, was invested a large share of the family property; the bulk of his cash was disposed of in his most secret repositories; but certain sums were reserved to satisfy such demands as might be made either in the way of trade, to purchase indemnity in case of need, or to produce, under

such circumstances as those he had now fallen into, to satisfy the rapacity of his superiors.

"When taken before the Khan, he was at once given to understand that his life was held forfeited, but should be spared upon payment of a prodigious sum, which was mentioned; in default of which he should certainly be permitted to expire under the tortures that would be applied.

"The terms of this intimation were sufficient to convince him that his fate was determined on; and he resolved to suffer the worst extremities, and save the fortune of his family, rather than yield it to his persecutors, upon the precarious chance of prolonging his own life for a few years more. He declared his inability to produce any thing like the sum required: the tortures were immediately applied, and he then, according to the plan he had laid down, produced gradually such sums as might lead the tyrant to believe that he had actually given up all the ready money in his possession. But the bloodhounds were not to be baffled thus: the tortures were continued; and my grandfather resolutely persisted in asserting that no more was to be had from him.

"Dreadful were the torments which these savages inflicted on the poor old man: his feet had already been beat into a shapeless mass of blood and bones. Molten lead was poured drop by drop upon his bare head; pieces of lighted candles were inserted in holes made in his flesh, until the flames were extinguished by the blood which flowed from the wounds. His fingers were crushed by heavy hammers, and not a part of his whole frame was left uninjured by his tormentors. But all was in vain; he would not speak; he even suppressed his groans.

"My father, then a young man, was present during great part of this dreadful scene. Wild with horror at the sufferings of his parent, gladly would he have given the whole treasure to end his torments. But the firm old man was absolute in his refusal to purchase his life on such terms. My father himself did not escape uninjured. The bastinado was applied till the nails of his toes fell off, and frantic with his sufferings and those of his parent, he turned an imploring look upon him. But the stern frown of

the aged sufferer gave a positive denial, which he enforced in the language of our tribe, unintelligible to his persecutors. 'Is my life worth preserving *now*?' said he, 'or canst thou not bear what I have borne?'—These were his last words—he expired in their hands; and his mangled corpse was yielded to my father by the baffled tyrant, who now became convinced that no more was to be extorted from the family.

"Heraf was now no place for our people;—most of the principal Jews quitted the city as opportunity offered; and my father, having in various ways conveyed his treasures to places of security beyond the walls, resolved to seek refuge in Mushed with his own branch of the family, while the rest of its members tried their fortune in other quarters.

"Thus, forty years ago, we reached this city, and from that time till now have inhabited this house, where we have suffered many losses, and endured great misfortunes, but none—none to compare in bitterness with that which I now deplore. Oh Yacoob! thou wast the companion of my youth, my support in misfortune, my comfort in affliction! thy wisdom and thy prudence was the light that guided our feet; thy kindness and affection sweetened the cup of life; and now thou art gone, the fortunes and prosperity of our house are departed!—Cursed be they who slew thee, my brother!—thrice cursed be thy murderers!"

I sought not to interfere with this burst of anguish, but soon after left the house, promising to visit it again; nor did I fail to do so frequently during the short time I remained in Mushed. I remarked, however, that the spirits of the wretched man never recovered their tone: his mind had received a shock which appeared likely to be fatal, not only to itself, but to the body which it animated; and I anticipated, with no small pain, the period at which I might be called upon to fulfil the pledge I had given, and protect the orphans of his murdered brother.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CATASTROPHE.

It was some time after this, that, going one evening to visit Meerza Aboo Talib, after a few days' absence, I was surprised to find the house occupied only by a slave, who put into my hands a letter and a sealed packet. The letter contained these words :—" Praise be to the one God of Heaven, and to his Prophet Mahomed, and Allee his lawful successor upon earth !—The clouds begin to break, my friend, and the light of hope has beamed upon my darkness ! The tidings I have received oblige me to repair to Ispahan without delay ; and thither, unless I am much deceived, you will ere long follow me. Allah grant that it be so ! and may the hour and the journey be propitious, as I trust will be that of your servant, who will not cease to cherish the hope of seeing you again. If you come to Ispahan before I return to Mushed, inquire for the merchant Aboo Talib, at the caravanserai Cashanee,—there you will hear news of me. Accept a parting testimony of regard from your friend, and may God have thee in his holy remembrance !" The packet was also directed to me, and contained a purse of two hundred tomauns.

I was thunderstruck at this intelligence. " He is gone then !" thought I,—" my best, my only real friend !—he is gone ; and there is none left to whom I can apply for advice or for assistance !—Alas ! how often have I neglected the one, and abused the other !" —My conscience,—my heart smote me, as I remembered how ill I had too often requited his friendly admonitions, and his disinterested kindness. My eyes filled with tears : an instinctive dread of evil came over me, like the mysterious whisperings of some spirit of darkness, and I felt as one abandoned to an irresistible and terrible fate.

The supply left me by my friend was, in truth, as opportune as unlooked for ; for I was reduced to my last dinar, and had been forced to part piecemeal with my arms and other valuables to provide for my wants. But what was even this supply to one whose mad extravagance increased with the means of gratifying it ?—my loose and

dissolute companions were the gainers by it,—not I. Happy had it been for me, if this career of vice and folly had been earlier checked by want and distress ; but it was written that I must suffer for my weakness,—that my experience should be full dearly purchased. The course I was pursuing could not long continue without some catastrophe, and mine was a terrible one.

My connexion with Fatimah, as well as that with her slave, had been regularly maintained during all this time ; and the former had absorbed a large proportion of the money I had squandered ; while the latter could scarcely be prevailed upon to accept the smallest gift. Every interview with the gentle Zeebah increased my affection for her, while the admiration I at first felt for her imperious mistress, began to give way to a disgust, occasioned by her insatiable rapacity and capricious temper.

It was not, perhaps, in the nature of things, that this double connexion should continue undiscovered, or even unsuspected ; and suspicion in this case was fatal. A believer in presentiments and auguries might have derived arguments in abundance for supporting his opinions, and for predicting the coming storm, from the symptoms and indications observable for several days before it burst. The health of Zeebah declined without apparent cause ; her cheerfulness failed, and she sighed frequently and heavily, as if to throw off the load that hung upon her heart. My own spirits were as unaccountably affected : an unspeakable anxiety preyed upon my mind. Even the manner and behaviour of Fatimah was altered : more than once I remarked in her an air of abstraction, which I could not account for, and she would not acknowledge.

On the morning of that fatal day, which never can be forgotten by me, I rose oppressed with an ominous gloom, which I strove in vain to dispel. I had promised to visit Fatimah in the afternoon ; and until then, I found myself wandering restlessly about, like a man under the influence of an evil spirit. As I repaired to the place of rendezvous, and traversed the lanes and passages that led to it, my heart sank with a foreboding of misfortune, which no effort of reason or resolution could shake off.

When I entered the apartment of Fatimah, there was a

hurry and confusion in her manner, as she received me, which in spite of my own depression of spirits, did not fail to strike me ; and though she made an effort to compose her features, and welcome me with a smile as she took her usual seat, I could not refrain from inquiring whether any thing had happened to disturb her ? " Nothing whatever," replied she : " I should rather put that question to you, Ismael ; for you look as grave and dull as if you had come to consult with a doctor of laws, not to meet your mistress : what is the matter ?"—" I cannot tell, Fatimah : it is true, however, my spirits are unusually low, and I come to you to cheer them : will you exert your powers upon me ?"

She cast a penetrating look at me ; but there was nothing in my countenance to awaken her suspicion. Resuming her smile, she said, " Well, my dear Ismael, we both require some cordial to restore us ; a little refreshment will do neither of us harm ; and as we seem likely to be poor company to each other, you will not, perhaps, object to some addition to our party. Nay, look not strange : I have invited some guests to-night ; for I begin to think Fatimah alone, for ever, might be tiresome. Ismael likes variety, does he not ?"

In truth, I did look at her with surprise.—Never, in the whole course of our intimacy, had such a thing been suggested, and I knew not what to think of the strange terms in which it was now proposed : there was a wild, unsettled expression in her eye, which ought to have roused my alarm ; but my mind was too absent to heed it much. " It is one of her caprices," said I, mentally, " we shall soon see to what it tends."

Sherbet and other refreshments were now brought in ; and Fatimah, taking a bowl, offered it to me, after putting her own lips to it. I observed that not a drop had passed them, and was surprised : perhaps, unknown to myself, a shade of suspicion now crossed my mind. " Here, Ismael," said she, " drink of this beverage ; it was prepared by Fatimah ; and trust me, its cool, refreshing influence will soon dispel this melancholy mood." The tremulous agitation of her voice, and the unsteady keenness of her eye, increased the alarm I had just began to

feel. "Excuse me, Fatimah, I cannot taste it! I know not why; but my soul turns with loathing from this draught! I am oppressed—I am ill!"—"What! Ismael loathe the cup presented by the hand of Fatimah? nay, then, I have rightly deemed thee changed! The day has been when even poison from her hands would have seemed sweet to Ismael;—but it is well: it matters not!" The fleeting colour and the suppressed sigh which accompanied these words, smote upon my heart; for I ascribed them to an emotion far other than the true one. "Upbraid me not, Fatimah," said I; "I meant not to slight your kindness: the meanest gift from your hands must ever be sweet to me!—give me the cup?" Slowly I raised it to my lips: but ere a drop had passed them, a piercing scream arrested my hand, and the liquor fell untasted on the floor. "Great God! whose voice was that? Fatimah! what meant that shriek!" She answered me not;—pale as ashes, and with her large dark eyes strained forward, her whole soul seemed bent to catch the next sound. Just then, a noise at the inner door struck her ear: "They are come!" cried she, a fierce joy lighting up her countenance,—“they are come! You who scorn the food I have prepared, see if you better like the guests I have bidden!” She clapped her hands, the door opened, and four female slaves appeared, leading in a woman veiled and bound; but while gazing at this ominous sight, I was myself seized from behind, and my arms were pinioned by several armed slaves, before I could rise to defend myself.

The face of Fatimah was now burning with the uncontrolled expression of the rage which filled her breast. Her large eye kindled, and her form dilated majestically as she addressed me with a bitter smile: "How say you, Ismael?—no word of welcome to my guests? Are they not such as you would have chosen? Are they all strangers to you? But stay, he has not seen them all: unveil the lady! You know not yet the kindness of Fatimah!"

Confounded with doubt and amazement, I stood listening to her words, almost unconscious of their meaning; but her manner froze my blood. I turned my eyes at her bidding, and fixed them in silent dread upon the veiled female: the veil slowly rose, and a wild cry of horror

escaped my lips as it discovered the features of the unfortunate Zeebah !

"Zeebah ! oh God ! thou in her power ! then all is discovered, and you are lost !"—"Hah ! you know her then ? you acknowledge your acquaintance ? Nay, start not with such horror !—am I not generous thus to bring lovers together ! Yes, wretch ! it is Zeebah, your paramour, your minion !—the slave whom your exquisite taste and discernment have preferred to her faded and insipid mistress !—for whose sake alone the noble Ismael still deigns to devote to that mistress a few of his idle hours !—Discovered ? yes, you are discovered ! Vile slave ! perjured traitor ! your treason is known, and your punishment is certain."

"Hear me, Fatimah !" cried I ; "I beseech you to hear me. If ever you loved me, listen now one moment."—"Loved *thee* ?" repeated she, with a laugh of scorn so wild that it sounded like a shriek : "Vain slave ! thinkest thou that the love of Fatimah is to be won by such as thee ?—Thou wert my toy—my tool—my dupe ! Love *thee* ! I spit at thee, vile dog !"

"Well, then," said I, anxious to soothe her by any means, "I was deceived indeed,—you loved me not, and I did not deserve thy love ; but if the hours of delight we have spent together, when I was thine wholly and in truth, have any place in thy remembrance, I beseech thee hear me now. Zeebah is innocent !—I alone am guilty, I was the seducer ; thoughtless folly, infatuation, madness, drove me on ; but it is only I that am to blame : on me, then, let all thy vengeance fall, but spare the innocent,—I conjure thee in the name of Allah and of Mahomet, and of the holy Fatimah, do no harm to Zeebah !"

"Hah ! well said ;—a most excellent advocate thou art, indeed ; and thy minion shall find her account in it. Who, indeed, can doubt the innocence of these secret meetings—in truth, she looks like innocence itself. Slaves ! bring her forward, and expose to her lover's view these chaste and innocent charms." The unhappy Zeebah, who hitherto had stood trembling in mute despair, was now dragged forward by the slaves. In a moment they tore off her upper garments, and her whole person, from the

waist upwards, became exposed to view. "See!" cried Fatimah, "see these beauties—look once more upon the charms which thou hast preferred to mine, for which I have been despised, deceived, insulted! Me—an Affghaun, thou hast dared to slight, to betray; and hoped, it seems, to elude my revenge! Even now thinkest thou, weak fool! to blind me?—to pacify my wrath by a few smooth words? Wretched, contemptible slave! did I not warn thee? Might not my tale have told thee that Fatimah was never to be duped or insulted with impunity? And now to the proof—Slaves, do your duty."

At this order the shrieking Zeebah was thrown upon the floor and held by two of the female mutes, while others beat her mercilessly with rods upon the back and shoulders. "Ismael! Ismael! can you suffer this? Oh! do not let them kill me! Allah, Allah! help me for God's sake!" shrieked Zeebah; and the sound of her voice, and the sight of this dreadful outrage, inspired me with a strength so furious, that I burst my bonds and freed my arms. It was but for a moment,—my guards threw themselves upon me, and overpowered all my frantic efforts. Zeebah's screams and groans were all in vain, and I was forced to watch the laceration of her lovely form, until she, almost insensible, had ceased to cry, and her tormentors stopped from absolute weariness.

"How say you of this specimen of Fatimah's vengeance?" demanded she, with a countenance still flushed with fiendish triumph at the sufferings of her helpless rival. "What think you of these beauties now? Where now is that soft and downy skin?" continued she, pointing to her back and sides all black and blue with the blows, and covered with bloody stripes. "You now, perhaps, begin to see how easily Fatimah is to be pacified."

"Ah, Fatimah," cried I, in the vain hope that her vengeance was now glutted with the terrible sufferings of her slave—"if you have one spark of the pity that belongs to your sex, spare that unfortunate; be content with the punishment she has received, and turn to me; take my life freely, but spare that miserable creature, who never can offend you more!"

"What! vile miscreant!" replied she, "seek you to aggravate my anger, that you venture to plead for her again?—do you not know me yet! Your life for hers indeed!—the reason, I pray, why either should be spared?—what are they both compared with the insult you have dared to offer me!—But he dares still—undeceive him, slaves: proceed with your work!"

The wretches now drawing knives from their girdles, held fast the miserable Zeebah, while they gashed her lovely bosom and her cheeks, till the blood flowed in streams from the gaping wounds. Almost totally lifeless, and deprived of sensation, the hapless slave seemed scarcely to heed her executioners; betokening her existence only by low moanings, she neither struggled nor stirred as they proceeded with their bloody task; while I, sickening at this horrid spectacle—which, firmly holding me, they forced me to behold—was equally deprived of power to move.

"Tigress! devil! unwomanly fiend!" cried I, when able to articulate; "finish thy barbarous act!—put an end to her tortures—take her life at once; and begin the bloody work with me!—let me no longer witness her sufferings!"—"There is a time for all things," answered Fatimah, with cool derision; "and thine is come. Take thy last look of thy minion, for never shalt thou see her more! Now, slaves, for him; see that you bind him fast, and do your duty."

The slaves obeyed—I was seized and thrown down:—the emergency of the moment gave me strength to struggle violently with my executioners for a while, but it was in vain; bound as I was, my efforts were useless. I was overpowered and thrown upon my back—the dagger that was to number me with the blind, gleamed in my eyes;—when a sudden noise, and the rush of many people from without, caused the ruffians to start up in sudden fear, and Fatimah herself to pause and listen in alarm. They were not long in suspense—the door flew open, and the Moolah himself entered the room, followed by a number of armed servants.

No sooner did Fatimah perceive her husband, than, uttering a short ejaculation of astonishment, she drew a

small dagger from her waist, and flying to the helpless Zeebah, who lay half supported in my view, that none of her tortures might be lost upon me, she plunged it twice in her breast. A faint groan from her victim, as she sank heavily on the floor, told that all her sufferings were past. Swift as lightning then did Fatimah rush towards me ; and the fate of Zeebah would have been mine also, but some of the Moollah's servants interposed, and, seizing her arms, secured her from committing farther violence.

The scene which now presented itself in the small apartment, appeared to strike the Meerza himself with horror. In one place lay the murdered Zeebah, weltering in blood, which also covered the persons of her executioners, and flowed in streams along the floor. With arms still bound, and garments all torn by my struggles, I lay in another corner, just where my guards had thrown and left me ; and near me stood Fatimah, held by the Meerza's servants, who had wrested from her the bloody knife ;—her clothes all sprinkled with the blood of her slave ; her frame panting with exertion, her cheeks flushed, and her eyes glaring furiously around. The numerous attendants stood looking at us, mute with astonishment, and waiting their master's commands.

Fatimah was the first to recover herself. She instantly decided on the part she had to take, and, composing her features, addressed her husband in a gentle persuasive tone. " Ah, my lord ! you have come in time to witness a signal act of justice. Behold this wretched slave and her infamous accomplice—they have been plotting against your life as well as mine. She has already paid the forfeit of her crimes ; the other, too, must die."—" Vile traitress !" replied the Meerza, " think not to deceive me any longer ! I have been too long blind to thy profligacy—but every thing is now discovered, and thy life, as well as theirs, is forfeit to my justice."

" You are deceived, my lord, you are deceived ; but not by me," she calmly replied. " I can give you proof of it—I will convince you ;—let but my slave Massooah approach.—Here, Massooah !" continued she, as one of the female mutes came forward, " my arms are bound—my worthy husband dreads my violence too much to

leave them at liberty—but he need not—here, seek for the paper which is in my bosom—let him see and be satisfied.” As the slave leaned forward to search in the robe of her mistress, it was observed that Fatimah bent her head and whispered a few words in her servant’s ear. After which the latter drew back among the other attendants. “What wouldst thou say?” cried the Meerza, impatiently. “What paper is that!—speak, woman!” The form of Fatimah once more dilated into its utmost expression of majesty; her eye once more shot glances so fierce, that the Meerza quailed and shrank back.

“What would I say?” cried she, with a loud and scornful laugh; “I would tell thee, Moollah, that thou art a fool! a weak, contemptible idiot! as well as a mean unprincipled hypocrite! Fatimah thy victim!—*thou* control her destiny!—wretched, sensual, malignant worm!—*thou* pass sentence on her, and determine how she is to live and when to die?—Vile, despicable slave, she scorns thy power. Fatimah alone disposes of her destiny—her hour is come indeed, but not at thy command—she laughs at all thy threats:—bring forth thy whips, thy knives, thy tortures, she heeds them not—she is beyond thy reach!”

“For thee, slave!” continued she turning to me, “dearly shalt thou answer for thy insults and thy perjuries to me—my vengeance is secure—I leave it in the hands of one who knows not how to pardon or to spare!—Moollah! he has wronged thee deeply—he has polluted the untainted purity of thy harem, and stained thy hitherto unsullied honour. Spare not the traitor who has robbed thee of that inestimable jewel, the love of Fatimah! hah! hah! hah!”—and she laughed fearfully:—“But Moollah, thou shalt not long exult in the fate of my victim—mine I say, for it is I who give him to thy vengeance;—the toils of death are weaving around thee, and soon both thou and he shall be alike:—it is Fatimah who tells thee this, and with her dying breath. And now, slaves! lead on whither your lord desires:—my moments are numbered—the dungeon or the palace—the bed of down or the dunghill, are alike to me!”

It seemed as if in truth her fate was in her own hands, for as she uttered these words her colour fled, her lips be-

came livid, and staggering backward a pace or two, she fell into the arms of those who held her. The activity of the poison she had received from the mute, was increased by her previous agitation, and the effects were awfully violent and sudden.

Dismayed and appalled with the scene that had passed, and with the last words of Fatimah, the Meerza had only power to direct that the body of the unfortunate Zeebah should be removed—that I should be guarded securely in a dungeon close by, and that Fatimah should be removed from this bloody apartment to one which her women usually occupied within ; and thither he himself followed her.

As for me, his attendants, perhaps to gratify their master's brutal disposition, roused me with a shower of blows from the place where I still lay, overwhelmed with horror at all that had just passed ; and as they forced me through the well-known passages I had so often traversed under feelings and circumstances so different, they vied with each other in the number and severity of their strokes. At last, opening a door which had before escaped my observation, they dragged me down a few steps, into a small, damp vault, without either furniture or opening, except that by which we entered ; where, roughly throwing me on the ground, they left me bound and in darkness, to my own meditations.

CHAPTER VII.

REMORSE.

IN vain should I attempt to describe the utter desolation and misery into which I was plunged by the scenes I had just witnessed. For a while I was sensible of nothing but a fearful mingling of mental and bodily suffering ; all was tumultuous, horrible, dark. The mind reflected no definite image ; it resembled the bed of a mountain torrent after a storm, choked with the ruins of all that the furious flood has destroyed in its course. Recovering by degrees from this painful stupor, I began slowly to retrace the terrible events of the last few hours ; and oh ! with what anguish did I recall the murder of the

unfortunate Zeebah in all its fearful truth. "Gone! for ever gone!" cried I mentally; "murdered! and in so terrible a way!—And Fatimah!"—I shuddered involuntarily—"by this time she too is dead! Savage, ruthless fiend! Oh, what a change from the fascinating lovely creature, who once dazzled and seduced my senses! But she loved me once! say what she might, she truly, fondly loved me; though not with the love of Zeebah;—and I—oh Zeebah, thou wert indeed dear to me! and yet I was thy murderer! And they are gone! both passed away—the gentle, warm affections of the one, and the fierce and dangerous passions of the other, alike quenched in the cold silence of death:—and this is the end of love so ardent! Allah! Allah! it is indeed dreadful!" My heart was full to bursting, but I had no tears to shed; my eyes were dry, and my brain was burning. For my own condition, as yet I thought not of it:—so painfully occupied had I been in pondering over the cruel fate of these two hapless women, that I did not even recollect I was a prisoner.

But the mind, though it may be supported by excitement for a time; must at last sympathise with the sufferings of its frailer tenement. The pain of the blows I had received, and the constraint of my bonds, at length forced themselves on my attention; and calling to mind all that had happened, I began to consider what my own fate might be. I had fallen into the hands of a cruel man, whom I had most deeply injured and insulted; there was no reason to hope that he would permit me to escape unpunished; and what punishment short of death could I expect, or could he inflict on me with safety to himself? There were few who could ever think of searching for me if I should be missed, so that he ran but little risk in case of putting me to death; but if, satisfied with a less fatal though more humiliating revenge, he should permit me to escape with life, he could never hope to be secure against my vengeance:—death then was, no doubt, at hand; the next morning's light would, in all human probability, see me a mangled corpse. But, appalling as such a prospect might have been some few hours before, it now had lost its terrors; for my heart was almost broken, and I was reckless of life. I had been witness of a deed, the horror of which

must for ever dwell in my memory and blast my happiness. The light of my soul was darkened for ever ; I knew not till now how much I had loved the unhappy Zeebah, and her bleeding mangled bosom was ever before me, even in the darkness of my dungeon, while her piercing shrieks still rang in my ears, till I tried in horror to stop them.

The admiration I had once entertained for Fatimah, had long since given way to the baneful effects of her haughty and capricious temper ; and her atrocious cruelty had completed my disgust while it roused my indignation. But she had once truly loved me : many an hour of bliss had I tasted with her, and what man can ever hate the woman who has once lavished all her tenderness upon him ? In spite of all that had passed, my wayward fancy still strayed back to the days of our early love : it painted her beauty, her smiles, her blandishments ; and then pointed to her noble form as sinking into the cold embrace of death. In the morning of this day, these fair creatures were both alive, in the pride of their beauty ; before night they were livid, mangled corpses :—how great a share had I in that catastrophe ! My heart was sick with anguish ; I rather welcomed, than dreaded the thought of death.

The misery which can reconcile a buoyant youthful mind to death, must be poignant indeed : and though a gloomy calm may succeed the storm which settles into so desponding a mood, the sufferings that produced it, will continue long unabated. Wretched, indeed, were the hours that elapsed in this dungeon, until weariness of body and exhaustion of mind at length combined to throw me into a state of insensibility, which scarcely could be termed sleep. My visions were as disturbed as my mind. The horrid scenes of the evening were again before me ; sometimes it was Zeebah, sometimes Shireen that shrieked for help. Selim and Aboo Talib flitted by in the distance, and I called on them to aid me. I felt myself still in bonds, and struggled to get free, while Fatimah, with her clayey face and livid lips, pressed me to the earth, and I shuddered with horror at the deathlike kiss she endeavoured to imprint upon mine. Torrents of blood seemed to foam around me, and the ghastly countenances of those I had known or loved, reared themselves above the waves,

and glared upon me with their glazed and sightless eyes. Every scene of horror I had ever heard of, or witnessed, seemed to be passing around me in fearful confusion. On a sudden, all faded away,—a light flashed on the darkness, and the form of the Dervish, the same who had warned me of my future fortune, and saved me from the dangers of the Desert, appeared hovering over me in a radiant cloud. At this sight all the trouble of my visions vanished, and the suffocating load which oppressed my heart, gave way to a feeling of peace and hope. I tried to stretch my hands towards him, to seek his aid and counsel; and awoke to find this part of my vision realized: for, bending over me, by the light of a lamp in his hand, that shone upon the same striking countenance, which was so strongly impressed on my memory, I saw the Dervish himself.

For some moments I believed that my senses were still mocked with an empty dream, and in order to rouse myself, I tried to rub my eyes; but the pain of my bonds, the tightness of which had now swelled and chafed my arms, not only convinced me that I was awake, but recalled me to a remembrance of my situation.

The calm which, in my vision, succeeded the Dervish's appearance, was surely the foreshadowing of that hope and comfort which was shed over my soul by his real presence. But yet I dared not to address him. There was a reproving spirit in the grave solemnity of his mien, which, joined to the silent but painful reproaches of my own conscience, overwhelmed me with confusion, and quite deprived me of all power to speak. He bent his keen eyes upon me for a while; and then stooping down, he loosed the cords which bound my arms. "Arise, young man!" said he, in his customary solemnity of tone; "arise and quit this place, unless you desire to abide the fate you but too well deserve."

It was not without a painful effort that I raised myself from the ground, and I fell more than once in the attempt. A piercing look from the Dervish, accompanied with the words "Be firm, young man! exert yourself, for much depends upon this hour," restored me to self-possession; and mustering up my strength, I left the dungeon. The dawn was just appearing, and by its grey and dubious

light I observed two of my guards asleep beside the door ; but they did not stir, as with a light and noiseless step we passed by them, and soon gained the lane beyond.

Stiff with the pain of my bruises and giddy with incipient fever, it was with great difficulty and with tottering steps that I followed my deliverer through several streets into an obscure part of the city, with which I was unacquainted. Entering a mean and mud-built house, and threading one or two narrow passages, we found a small but comfortable apartment, plainly furnished, with a bed ready spread upon the floor. "Rest thee here, young man, and fear nothing," said the Dervish ; "here thou art secure from every thing, except the reproaches of that inward monitor which never suffers guilt to slumber :—but the body must be relieved from pain, that the mind may be restored to soundness : behold, the next apartment contains a bath ; use it to refresh thy bruised limbs ; I will revisit thee again."

The bath had evidently been prepared for an expected guest ; no sooner had I undressed and stepped into the smoking cistern, than an attendant entered and offered his services as *dullauk*,* which I was glad to accept, being unable to assist myself. The effect of this bath, aided by the skill of my attendant, produced a wonderful effect ; the pains of my bruises and the stiffness of my joints abated, as if by magic, and so well did the *dullauk* understand the niceties of his trade in kneading the muscles and pulling the joints, that I came out as I believed, almost free from any kind of illness, and took possession of the bed prepared for me, in full hope of rising quite recovered. But I was mistaken ; the shock which had been sustained both by mind and body was too severe to fail of producing serious effects ; the fever, which had been mitigated for a time by the salutary effects of the bath, quickly returned ; my head became confused, wild dreams once more harassed my rest ;—delirium soon came on, and rendered me insensible to all around me for several days.

On my return to consciousness I found myself lying in

* Or barber, who attends at the Hummaums upon those who take the bath.

a place of which I had no recollection, attended by a single person, who, seated at a little distance on the ground with his head resting on both his hands, was watching me attentively:—it was Cossim Allee, my old Jeloodar, whom not immediately recognizing, I addressed as a stranger. The old man started at the sound of my voice—“Allah Kereem!”* cried he, after looking earnestly at me for a few moments—“he speaks!—he speaks sensibly—he is better!—he will be well again! Alhumdulillah! Alhumdulillah.”

“Is it you, Cossim Allee?” said I faintly. “Where am I? what is the matter? what means all this? where is Fouje Allee?—where?”—I stopped abruptly:—dire and fearful recollections began to revive.—“For God’s sake, my dear master! be composed,” said Cossim Allee earnestly;—“you are in safety—you are with friends;—only be calm, be tranquil, and every thing will be well. Oh! what joy is it to me to see you better,—I have watched you with such anxiety!”

“I have been ill then? Stay!—yes,—I think—poison, was it not?—No, no,—I remember now—oh! was it all reality?” I shuddered and groaned so deeply, as the late fearful images arose in my mind, that my servant began to fear I was wandering again. But this was not the case: my heart was indeed smitten with that sickening dismay which the sudden consciousness of some terrible misfortune often produces; but my bodily complaints had left me. Though exceedingly weak, I was free from disease; and as all emotions, whether of joy or sorrow, can act but feebly on a mind enervated by disease, the misery I still endured from a retrospect of what had passed, was not sufficient to retard my recovery.

It was a few days after the restoration of my senses, while lying on my couch, and musing mournfully on the past, that the Dervish entered the room. His countenance wore the same character of calm penetration, which had rendered it so remarkable on other occasions; but a shade of grave severity darkened its expression, as, standing by the couch on which I lay, he fixed his keen eyes on

* God is merciful.

my face. His look entered my soul, and, labouring as I was with conscious guilt, I could not articulate a word.

"It has pleased the Giver of Life," said he at last, "to snatch thee, young man! from the brink of that gulf to which thy folly and thy crimes had led thee, and to extend the span of thy mortal career. The ills of thy body are removed, and the power of thy mind is restored. It becomes thee at such a crisis to look back upon the time that is past, and think of that which is to come. Hast thou satisfaction in the review? or doth thy conscience declare that thy sins and thy follies have been many, that the stream of thy life hath been darkened by repeated transgressions? and dost thou feel that now, when rising by the mercy of God from the bed of danger and of pain, it is meet for thee to repent of thy misdeeds, and resolve upon amendment? How sayest thou, youth?—is it then otherwise with thee?—doth the tenor of thy conduct hitherto receive the approbation of thy conscience?—hath thy past life been blameless in thy own regard? Then is a monitor useless to thee, and thou hast but to proceed in the path thou hast chosen. Pursue then thy excesses, be still the minion of a wanton, the seducer of innocence, the heartless spendthrift, the unblushing abuser of generous friendship;—continue to desert thy chief, to abandon those who cherished thee when friendless and unknown, and to stray from the path of honour and of fortune which the bounty of Providence had spread before thee:—declare, is this thy resolution? Thinkest thou it was for this thou wert saved from the sword of the murderer, and the blasts of the Desert, when others perished around thee?—Was it but to become what now thou art, that thou wert spared when thy parents fell by the hand of the destroyer, and the blood of thy kindred was poured to the wolves of the Desert? What is thy reply? Is thy heart still hardened to the truth?—is repentance still far from thee?"

He paused:—but, overwhelmed with bitter thoughts, I could not speak. His words, with a force like that of magic, had conjured up the whole dark tissue of my crimes in their true and dreadful colours, and I saw with despair the gulf into which I had fallen. Enervated as I was by bodily weakness and mental suffering, I scarce

could feel another pang ; yet the thoughts of my innocent childhood, the remembrance of my unhappy parents, and the wishes and prayers of my dying mother, came like a dagger to my soul : I hid my face with my hands, and groaned aloud.

The Dervish, stern and immovable, with his searching eye fixed upon me, stood still, awaiting a reply. "Father," faltered I at length, "if, as I think, thou canst read the heart thou hast so keenly probed, it were needless for me to speak. Thy words, though harsh, are true ; and thy reproaches just, though poignant. But well thou mayest know, that their sharpness can never equal the pangs I feel within me. Whatever of farther sufferings thou hast to announce, I am ready to endure, though death itself should terminate them : no punishment can exceed the anguish of that remorse which gnaws my heart at this moment."

"Remorse," rejoined the Dervish, "like the aloes and myrrh of Arabia, is bitter but salutary to the soul ; and thou hast merited to feel its pangs, for great have been thy faults and fatal their consequences. But search thy heart, young man ; examine, and declare whether the pain thou feelest be in truth the offspring of repentance for thy crimes, or of despair for that which thou hast lost ;—anguish for the dreadful fate of her thou lovedst, and of which, too surely, thou wert the cause, or contrition for the sin which led to her destruction. Could those, the blossoms of whose lives have been gathered by the Angel of Death, be again permitted to bloom in the garden of existence, wouldst thou not greedily seek to renew those guilty ties, transgressing thus again the law of God and man ? Has the bitter lesson of the past brought wisdom on its wings ? Would life, if life be spared thee, be better used in future ? and would thy course be henceforth pursued with zeal and blamelessness of heart ? If this be thy resolution, then have thy sufferings and thy remorse not been in vain ; thy sins may be blotted from the book of retribution, and Allah, in his mercy, may seal thy pardon."

"Alas ! holy Dervish," returned I, "it is Allah alone that can tell the sincerity of my repentance, or judge how much of the agony which distracts me springs from so

laudable a source; but I can truly declare, that I so loathe my errors, that I would willingly purchase deliverance from them and from their consequences, at the price of life itself! Alas! what has life now for me!—the cup of happiness is for ever poisoned, the weight of blood is on my soul, and the forms of those who were the victims of my crimes, haunt me unceasingly with their ghastly looks, scaring peace and rest from my weary soul. Would to Heaven that I were dead indeed! for the rose of life is withered, and the sun of my destiny has set for ever!”

“Is this thy penitence?” replied the Dervish with severity; “is it thus that thou dost bow before the rod which chasteneth thee in mercy?—Is it for thee to scan the purposes of the Most High, and to murmur because one worm is spared and another gathered to the dust from whence it sprang? Well hast thou said that the Omniscient alone can read the heart of man—hast thou forgot that the murmurings of thine are all before his penetrating eye? and dost thou not tremble to provoke his wrath by thy rebellious complaints?—My son,” continued he, his sternness softening into a grave solemnity as he watched the powerful effect of his reproaches, “seek thou to know thyself; search thy heart for its secret sins, curb and mortify thy passions; guard against vanity, presumption, and inordinate love of pleasure; from these, aided by idleness and evil company, have all thy faults and all thy misfortunes sprung. The merciful Sovereign of the universe grants thee time and opportunity to redeem thy errors,—beware of slighting his gracious bounty. Tarry no longer in the haunts of temptation. Thy strength will soon be restored: delay not then, quit this place and return to thy duty. Rejoin the Chief to whose fortune thou art linked, and who requires the present aid of all his faithful servants.—And now, my son, farewell! A mighty arm has dispersed the clouds which gathered round thy path, and threatened to obscure thy destiny; pursue under its guidance the course of virtue and of honour once more open before thee, and forget not that the more gracious the warnings, the more signal the deliverances thou hast experienced, the deeper will be thy guilt and the heavier thy punishment shouldst thou again relapse into error. May

the Omnipotent protect thee with his might, and ever have thee in his keeping !”

With these words the Dervish withdrew, leaving me more than ever perplexed at the singular influence he exercised over my fate. But the effect of his visit and admonition was infinitely salutary : a sense of hope and confidence arose in my breast, and gradually put to flight the despondency and recklessness of life which even from the moment of my restoration to consciousness and memory had settled on my spirits, and seemed to be fast weighing me down to the grave.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CLOSE OF A TALE OF GUILT.

DURING the continuance of my infatuation at Mushed, no event of consequence took place in Khorasan. The attention of Nader and his officers was fully occupied in compelling the obedience of the turbulent and inconstant tribes which occupied the northern part of the province. Not only did the Koords continue their usual rebellions, and the Toorkomans their customary inroads ; but even some divisions of the Afshars and other well-disposed tribes around Dereguz and Kelaat, were by some means seduced from the path of their duty, and joined the insurgents.

These disturbances were not a little encouraged by the intrigues of the weak Shah Tahmaseb and his ministers, who were jealous of the rising power of Nader, and who, little caring what injury the public might sustain, sought by every means in their power to effect his ruin. The rebels at length appeared in so formidable a shape, that Ibrahim Khan, who was despatched with orders to reduce the district, became unable to oppose them in the field, and was forced to take shelter within the fortress of Dereguz, where he was vigorously besieged by the chief of Diroom and several of the Zafferanloos. Nader, whose arms had been crowned by their usual success in the more southern parts of the province, on receiving these unplea-

sant tidings, turned his steps towards Dereguz, carrying along with him the person of the weak Shah Tahmaseb.

It was at this time that, rising from the bed of sickness, I prepared to rejoin the standard of my chief. It was unfortunate for me that every one who was interested in my welfare should happen to be absent from Mushed at a period when I became more particularly exposed to the snares of vicious pleasure. The activity of Ibrahim Khan was so useful to the service of his brother, that his duty seldom permitted him to visit the capital; and Caleb Allee Beg, my more immediate commanding officer, had left it in attendance upon his master. Consideration for my health, still at that time weak from the consequences of my wounds,—perhaps, too, an ill-judged indulgence,—had permitted me to remain behind in Mushed, from whence, had I acted rightly, I should have rejoined the General in camp as soon as my strength permitted me to do so. But there was no friendly voice to warn me of my danger, no kind monitor to urge me on in the path of duty:—I yielded to the temptations around me, and now suffered for my weakness. But the delusion was past; every thing I saw around me was pregnant with painful recollections, and I longed to quit the hateful scene, with all the disgust of a sickened, desolated, blighted heart.

The arrangements for my departure were neither tedious nor complicated. Of all the property I had accumulated, there now only remained the arms which were the gift of Selim,—these I never put in jeopardy, even when my pecuniary resources were at the lowest,—and the suit I had received from the General after my first introduction. These, with my gallant steed Boorauk, had been secured by Cossim Allee, when, in obedience to the orders of the Dervish, he quitted my former quarters, and came to attend upon me in the retreat to which I had been removed. It did not take much time to pack up these things; and as soon as I could sit a horse with safety I bade adieu to Mushed.

Before I proceed with my story, I must return for a moment to the melancholy catastrophe which has so lately been described, and shortly relate the sequel, which came to my knowledge on a subsequent visit to the city. One

day as I was passing, deeply absorbed in thought, by the steps in front of an old mosque, my reflections were interrupted by an aged and squalid-looking female, who besought my charity. "A few dinars to buy me food, in the name of the holy Imaum! for the sake of the blessed Fatimah!" exclaimed she in a cracked and trembling voice, the tones of which startled me. "Fatimah!" echoed I, instinctively taking out a piece of money, while a sigh of painful recollection rose in my breast; "what unlucky demon could induce you to plead to me in such a name?—and in such a spot too!" added I, looking up and shuddering as I recognized the old mosque, from the minarets of which I had first pried into the old Meerza's harem.

"Strange and unlucky indeed! if my eyes and my ears, old and weakened as they are, do not deceive me," muttered the miserable object with a groan:—"that voice should be the voice of Ismael Beg, who truly knew *one* Fatimah but too well? But how can he be among the living? How could he have escaped from the fate to which he was doomed?"—"And who are you that know this Ismael?" exclaimed I; "who is it that can thus allude to the secrets of that terrible night?"—"I cannot dispose of my secrets for nothing!" replied the old woman; "nor can I on any terms tell what you desire, where we now are. If you would know me, if you would listen to all I am in possession of regarding these same very creditable transactions, give me a piece of gold—my tidings are worth so much, I promise you—and follow me: you shall learn what I know, and judge how far it may concern thee!" The name of Fatimah,—the allusion to that fatal tragedy, the remembrance of which no time could erase from my mind, had awakened so much painful curiosity, that I did not hesitate to comply with the old woman's request, and followed her tottering steps from the mosque to a wretched and retired hovel at a little distance.

"A very different sort of apartment this," said the crone, "from that which you may remember of old, and not far from hence, to which I once conducted you, friend Ismael! nor can it boast of an inhabitant so young and so fair as her who charmed your hours of dalliance in a hum-

bler dwelling. But youth flies and beauty fades; time and sorrow blight the flowers, if death should even spare the plant."—"Trifle no longer," interrupted I, impatiently; "my part of the agreement is performed—let yours be so likewise:—who are you? speak!"

"Little pleasure will the knowledge give you," replied the hag, with a malicious laugh; "but, Allah! we must be honest; we must tell the truth, though it break our hearts! Learn, then, young man, that I am she who destroyed your paradise! who dispelled all your blissful visions! and sent your houris to await their lover—in heaven or in hell! I am she who wrought the death of Fatimah,—of Zeebah,—of the Meerza himself! ay, and who little cared if Ismael had been added to her victims! Do you not remember me? Were you not warned, that he who sought the love of my mistress, required a stout heart and a firm mind? yet, boy as you were, you hoped to enjoy her smiles, and bask unharmed in the glare of her dangerous charms!"

I now recollected the voice: it was the old woman who had given the alarm when I was gazing from the housetop;—it was my guide to the private apartments of Fatimah! "I know thee now," exclaimed I; "and well do I recollect thy scorn and thy warning, though I knew not how I had incurred thy contempt. I never harmed thee,—why then dost thou boast of having planned my ruin?"—"Thy ruin! vain worm! I never planned it; I sought but to secure my own ends; and what did Kharabeh care how many insects might be scorched by the blaze that consumed her foes?"

"Listen! I was once the favoured slave of Fatimah; a creature, as she thought, devoted to her interest. She found me in the harem of her lord; and well could I tell the fate of its numerous and often changed inmates. I was kind, convenient, faithful to them, while they made it my interest so to be; but an insult, or an injury, I never forgot or forgave. So often had I become the instrument of detecting the intrigues of those I hated, and of exposing them to the indignation and vengeance of my master, that he reposed a degree of confidence in me which was denied to all his other servants.

"When Fatimah entered the Zenanah, I discovered very soon that we were to be rivals in influence ; and that unless we could come to a mutual understanding, one or other of us must fall. The infatuation of my old master was at first so great, that any attempt on my part to injure Fatimah in his opinion, would have recoiled upon myself. My only resource was to offer her terms of alliance, and these she accepted ;—but neither was deceived : we knew the grounds we respectively stood upon, and kept a jealous eye upon each other.

"You believe, perhaps, that you were the first with whom she strayed from the paths of duty—deluded boy ! many were the dupes and toys of whom she made such use as she did of you !—but when their time was come, when all their substance was exhausted, and they became poor and wretched, they were easily got rid of without involving others in their ruin :—the insects were brushed off when they grew troublesome, and they teased no more ; and so it would have been with you, had no interest but yours been at stake. But Fatimah could not be wise : she provoked the wrath of Kharabeh, and by her means became involved in the ruin which she designed for you and for your paramour alone !"

"Woman !" interrupted I, "I have sufficient cause to know myself the dupe of Fatimah, and I do not doubt thy words ; but what could have occasioned the fatal change in thy conduct to thy mistress ? What made thee so deeply her enemy ? What could induce thee to aim so terrible a blow at others whom thou hadst no cause to hate ?"—"No cause !—but you shall hear ; you have bought my information, and it shall all be yours, should the hearing of it strike thee dead !"

"The understanding which subsisted between Fatimah and me was hollow as the truce which binds two mortal foes,—only while they have cause to dread each other's arms. *She* felt that she had power, and presumed too much upon it ; *I* watched my opportunity to destroy it. This might have soon been effected, had she not found it convenient to purchase my services. She hated her husband ; she loved gaiety and variety, and these she could not enjoy without my assistance. To secure this, she la-

vished magnificent promises, part of which she found it necessary to fulfil, and she never could have satisfied my increasing demands if she had not possessed such sources of supply as you are now aware of.

"Thus largely bribed, I devoted myself to the will and pleasure of Fatimah;—not only did I conceal my knowledge of her irregularities, I gave them all possible assistance, and became, as you have cause to know, the active agent of her intrigues. But even the powerful motives of interest and preservation of character, added to the necessity she felt of satisfying those appetites and tastes to which she was so much a slave, were insufficient to restrain the proud and imperious spirit of Fatimah; she could not always repress the taunts and insults which rose to her lips; and the jealous hatred she bore to me in secret would occasionally burst forth in spite of her better judgment. Fresh presents and ample promises, it is true, were always ready to repair these errors; but the gall which tipped these arrows of her spite, would continue to smart even after the wounds were, to all appearance, healed. My spirit became embittered towards her, and nothing but the extravagant rewards with which she held my interest in check, restrained me from exacting a desperate revenge.

"Such was the state of feeling between my mistress and myself, when her intrigue with you commenced. You proved a better prize than I expected, and the closing scene was consequently deferred longer than in most cases. Your own imprudence in commencing another intrigue, and with her own slave too, was the means of throwing you both more in my power. Fools! to believe that ye could deceive the lynx eyes which surrounded you. It was impossible that the frequent absence of Zeebah from her domestic duties could long remain unnoticed—she was watched, and your secret discovered. I knew it all, but treasured up the knowledge as a powerful hold upon my mistress. I now had it in my power to alarm her with the assurance that she had a rival, and I knew well that she would purchase the secret at whatever rate I might choose to fix. In truth, the youth, and—I may confess it now—the beauty of Zeebah had always been hateful to me; she

had dared to laugh at the age and peculiarities of Khara-beh,—she had mocked and insulted me in her own way, and I owed her a suitable return.

“It were vain to waste time in repeating the trifles which gradually led to a disclosure of my secret; nor need I try to describe the rage of my mistress when she became acquainted with the truth. With clenched hands and sparkling eyes, and lips all pale with anger, she muttered through her set-teeth an oath of bloody vengeance,—while the promises of recompense she heaped upon me exceeded all moderate, or probable bounds. They were barren promises. My mistress was too extravagant to be prepared for unexpected demands upon her purse; she had no means of satisfying mine, and I was unwilling to wait her convenience, perhaps her necessity. Importunate, and perhaps exorbitant, from the knowledge of my power, I urged my claims, until her indignant spirit was chafed;—we both lost temper;—high words arose; I threatened her with vengeance for all her insults; and she defied me to do my worst, in terms of contempt and abuse that stung me to the quick:—I was privy to her whole plan of bloody revenge upon Zeebah and you, and in the frenzy of the moment I vowed that the victims should be yet more abundant than she looked for.

“Greatly as the Meerza had been dazzled by the charms of Fatimah, and ardent as his love for her had once been, her fierce imperious temper had gradually weakened the hold she at first possessed on his affections, until a certain dread of her violence became the only remaining source of her influence with him. That Fatimah exercised a freedom exceeding what is generally permitted to women, the Meerza was not ignorant; but whether he entertained a suspicion of the lengths to which she went, I never could discover. He did not watch her conduct, nor seek for matter of accusation against her; and until this time none of his household had ever dreamt of awakening a prejudice in his mind against his favourite wife.

“But the hour of her destiny was come, her ruin was decided on. Furious with passion I went to the Meerza, and without stipulating for any terms for myself, or think-

ing of the smallest reservation, I told him all I knew concerning his wife's intrigues. The man was thunder-struck ;—for some minutes he sat muttering to himself, twisting his mustachios, stroking his beard, and knitting his heavy brows the while, so fiercely as almost to conceal his eyes from view. ' Woman, take heed to thy words !' said he at last. ' Something of this I have suspected ; but,—if thou speakest truth, thy reward is sure—if otherwise, beware !'—' My lord may satisfy himself that his slave hath spoken truth,' replied I, ' and be himself the witness of his wife's baseness.'—I then detailed to him the whole particulars of Fatimah's projected plan concerning thee and Zeebah, to which he listened with unmoved gravity, but with a dark and ominous scowl upon his brow that almost made me tremble. Perhaps, when my anger had a little cooled, I half repented of the desperate and irretrievable step which I had taken, and wished I had been less precipitate. But the deed was done, and no retreat remained ; for the only question now was, whether I should be the victim, or Fatimah. The only method of saving her was to sacrifice myself ; and for that, had I been fool enough to resolve upon it, there was now no time. The hour of action approached ; the preparations of Fatimah were complete,—so were those of the Meerza. Zeebah was within her toils, but little did my mistress dream that her own fate was involved in that of her victim. The result you are acquainted with ; I need not remind you of each circumstance.

" My unfortunate mistress gave no sign of consciousness after she was conveyed from the apartment where the catastrophe took place. Strong convulsions and a continued low moaning led those about her to believe that the hour during which she yet lingered was one of great agony : but if such was the case, her habitual pride and self-command enabled her to suppress all more positive complaints ; and she yielded up her last breath without uttering a word.

" The harsh countenance of the Meerza retained a strong expression of horror and distress while he watched her dying agonies, and he continued gazing on the body long after life was fled. He was only roused from this

torpor by a sense of racking pains throughout his frame, which, increasing in intensity, speedily affected his senses, and deprived him of reason. He raved of Fatimah and Zeebah, and others of his household who had fallen victims at various times to his jealousy or cruelty: he called on them to take their burning eyes from off his heart, and to bring the snows of Kaf to cool his liver. He continued in this dreadful condition for six or seven hours, when death put an end to his sufferings. His blackened face and starting eye-balls; his body swollen to bursting of the skin, proclaimed that poison must have caused his death; but how or when it was administered remains undiscovered. His heirs, distant kinsmen, were too well pleased with the unexpected acquisition of his property, to investigate very strictly the causes of his death; a few presents hushed up every mouth, and they divided his wealth. The household was dispersed; the young and useful slaves fell to other masters, while the aged and faded females were turned loose to shift for themselves. I was among the number of the last. The presents and the money I had saved were sufficient to have supported me a long time, had I known how to take care of them; but I had learned extravagance from my unfortunate mistress, and all my property was soon dissipated. Beggary stared me in the face; I was shunned by all my acquaintances from the moment they discovered I had nothing more to give them; and my soul, embittered by misery, often wanders back to the days that are gone, and is haunted by the memory of those I have destroyed, but, above all, by the image of the generous and unfortunate, though proud and haughty Fatimah.

"Such is my story; from you I can expect nothing but hatred and injury. Be it so.—I am wretched and destitute, often to the want of a morsel of bread; but want and misery are less terrible than the tortures of a despairing mind, and the kindest deed that friend or enemy could do me now, would be to bury his dagger in this withered breast, and let me sleep the sleep of death."

Heartstruck at this recital, and overwhelmed with the flood of painful recollections which it had excited, I hurried from the place. I could not harm the miserable

wretch, already a prey to sufficient ills, but neither could I bring myself to administer assistance to one who had so wantonly trifled with the lives and happiness of those around her; who had so basely betrayed her mistress, and sacrificed with such unfeeling selfishness, persons who had never done her injury. The frightful events of that fatal night were again recalled to memory, and the shades of Zeebah and Fatimah haunted my imagination for a long time after.

CHAPTER X.

FRESH HOPES.

It was early on a morning about the middle of March, that, weak and emaciated as I still was, I mounted my trusty Boorrauk, and accompanied by Cossim Allee on a stout yaboo, which also served to carry the whole of my baggage, I quitted Mushed to join the General at his camp near Radcan.

Though scarcely yet able to travel, I so loathed the city, and panted so to breathe the free air beyond its walls, as if that alone could relieve my heart from its load, that I would no longer delay my departure; and in reality, the moment I passed the north-western gate, through which my road lay, I felt my spirits rise. The air was fresh and balmy; the snow, though still lying plentifully in spots and stripes upon the distant mountains, had left the plains, which were tinged with an emerald hue by the sprouting of the young grass. Innumerable little flowers of every colour were springing on the brown, gravelly banks; thousands of birds were making the heavens resound with their cheerful notes, and clouds of insects fluttered in the sunshine. On every side the peasants, encouraged by the comparative security they now enjoyed, were plying their agricultural labours, and the plain around the city was alive with groups of men, women, and animals of every description. A change from the dreary confinement of a sick chamber, where the mind had no other occupation than to brood over its own gloomy reflections, to a scene

like this—where all nature appeared rejoicing, was exhilarating beyond expression ; but the wounds I had received were yet too green to enable me fully to enjoy it ; and a chill would ever and anon strike upon my heart, as the thought of those who were gone came over it,—as I remembered that spring did not now smile for them, that joy would return to them no more : nevertheless, the healthful elasticity of the air, and the consciousness that I had abandoned my evil ways, and was once more likely to be actively and honourably employed, had a salutary effect upon my spirits ; every day increased my strength, and by the time I reached the General's camp, I was fit to take a part in the duty that was going on.

Conscious of the room my conduct had given for censure, I looked forward with no small uneasiness to my first interview with the stern and rigid Nader, and appeared before him with a downcast countenance and humbled air : it was fortunate for me that his attention was too much engrossed with matters of greater moment, to admit of his expending much of his anger upon me.

He was seated in his tent of audience, busily engaged in listening to reports of service, and issuing orders to several officers who stood before him. The tidings he had received were probably unsatisfactory, for displeasure lowered in his countenance, and his brows were contracted by their peculiar and ominous frown. I should willingly have deferred the interview until a more auspicious moment ; but I was already standing with others waiting their turn to be introduced, and the Yessawul on duty, perhaps intending me a kindness, called me forward, and announced my name as "Ismael Beg Keerkloo, Gholaum, and officer of the guard, returned from sick leave at Mushed, to kiss the dust of his Highness' footsteps." "Ismael Beg Keerkloo," repeated Nader in an under tone, as if uncertain to whom the name applied, while his brows were brought yet closer by his deepening frown, "we had almost forgotten him, as he seems to have done his duty. Let him go to his commanding officer ; we shall, no doubt, receive a report concerning him in due time ;—we seek not his attendance here. Yet, stay," added he, with a softening look, as he remarked my pale

and sickly appearance ; " it seems that you have in truth been ill, young man ; be the cause what it may, these enervated limbs will do but feeble service against an enemy : go,—you have leave ; report yourself to your commander, receive his orders, and return, if you can, to your duty." Humbled and distressed, though glad to have come off so well upon the whole, I was not sorry to withdraw, and went to the tent of Caleb Allee Beg.

This officer received me with a coldness and severity the more painful to me, because I esteemed and desired to be well thought of by him. His words were few, but the tone in which they were uttered was expressive of a contempt and disappointment almost approaching to disgust, which stung me to the quick. When I solicited his orders, he coolly observed, that the men, nominally under my command, were at the time engaged on distant and somewhat arduous service, " for which," added he, casting his eyes over my emaciated frame, " I think you are hardly fit. A worn-out rake can never fill the place of the bold soldier ; he who sacrifices his health in dissipation, and his time on folly, will look in vain for honour or fortune in the field ; nor need the slave of a ' dark eye ' presume to hope for the approving glance of his commander. It will be some time, young man, ere you can look to enjoy the confidence that was at first rashly reposed in you—at present remain where you are, and watch, if you are wise, an opportunity for regaining the character you have too lightly lost." To such remarks, or sarcasms, however cutting, I could make no reply ; for I had deserved them all ; but they chafed me sorely, and increased the impatience I felt for the time when I should be able to prove that Ismael was as brave, as zealous, and as active as ever, and that though the star of his destiny had suffered an eclipse, it was but to shine out with redoubled lustre.

Next day the troops marched towards Khabooshan, and I once more saw the face of an enemy. Parties of Koords and Toorkomans were seen upon the heights, but they scoured off as we approached, sometimes leaving a single horseman to observe our advance, and carry the latest information of our movements to their host. No opposition was offered to our progress, and we unceremoniously pos-

assed ourselves of such fodder and provision as the villages around the town afforded, in spite of the outcry of the ryots, and their protestations of being totally unconnected with the rebels, whose souls they gave to perdition, and their fathers to be burned.

A large body of Koords, having heard of the General's approach, endeavoured to make good their way into the town of Khabooshan, where their families, as they thought, might be safe, while they themselves should be absent with the main body of the rebels, near Dereguz. But Nader, who had exact intelligence of all their movements, resolved to cut them off; and with that intention despatched fifteen hundred men to post themselves in a hollow near which the Koords must necessarily pass; while, with a still larger force, he should wait until they were fairly on the march, and then make his appearance threatening their rear.

Eager to wipe off the blemish which my character had sustained, I obtained permission to accompany Caleb Allee, with part of the guard, on this ambush, which we reached an hour or more before day-break, and waited with extreme impatience for the approach of the enemy.

The Koords gave us time enough to make all possible calculations on the probable event of the enterprize, and even to exhaust the patience of some, who swore that our plan must have miscarried—that the enemy must have obtained information of our movement, and taken another path in order to avoid falling in with us. These doubts and speculations were at last terminated; for about an hour before noon our advanced sentinels and scouting parties gave notice that they heard the low heavy tramp of horses at a distance, which doubtless proceeded from the march of our expected antagonists.

I was on duty with one of these reconnoitring parties, and had pushed forward with a few others to the foot of a little eminence scantily covered with prickly herbs, when our ears were arrested by the sullen sound: no dust arose to mark the quarter from whence it came, and our party was divided in opinion regarding the nature and intentions of the approaching column. "The sound is from the east," said one, "I hear it swell on the faint breeze."—

"No ; from the west," replied another, "it clearly comes from yonder ; it cannot be the Koords whom we expect, for it comes from the direction of the town itself—they have heard of our ambush, and intend to aid their friends, and discomfit us if they can by a sally."—"Ye are wrong," observed an old Affshar—"it is undoubtedly the Koords : the sound comes from that direction—from the north-west ; but it is changed by the current of the air in this hollow :—hark ! they approach : these are not the regular bounds of galloping horse, it is the baggage cattle and the herds that make the confused noise ye hear."—"I will climb this hill," said I ; "I can creep upon my breast without fear of being seen—the colour of my dress will conceal me,"—"Insh-allah !" replied they, "try it, but take care ; these Koords have eyes as sharp as yours of the Desert—beware of alarming the prey, and have on, in the name of Allah !"

Cautiously, and winding like a snake among the prickly shrubs, I crawled up the hillock and cast a rapid glance around. Then indeed I became aware of the truth, and witnessed an inspiring sight. The Koords with their wives and families, cattle and baggage, had quietly proceeded on their march until they found themselves pursued and threatened in rear by the General's troops. The men then faced about, and showed front to protect the weaker portion of their party, but evinced no disposition to engage ; while our friends, seeing them running directly into the jaws of our ambush, pressed closely upon them. I saw the old people and women urging on the flocks and herds ;—camels, mules, horses, and asses, loaded with baggage, were rapidly approaching, mingled with herds of cattle and sheep, mares and their foals, human creatures and dogs, in all the confusion of hurry and terror ;—behind clustered a confused and dusky mass of men, forth from which the gleam of arms would frequently break, and distant as they were, the tumult of the battle might be heard : a glance told me how things were, and I speedily glided down and rejoined the main party with the rest of my companions.

The scouts now came in from all quarters, and the whole force, concentrated, held itself in readiness to pour upon the unsuspecting and devoted Koords. The thunder of

the trampling approached, and at length we could distinguish that the foremost of the crowd were already passing the hollow which concealed us. The country on their right was divided into numberless hillocks, behind some of which we were posted; while a plain of a mile in breadth, inclined gently on their left to a small stream that ran along it in a deep clayey bed; along this plain they were marching, avoiding the broken ground on their right.

When the troops became aware that a part of the retreating Koords had passed, their impatience became excessive, and it was with no small difficulty that their officers could restrain them until the proper moment for the attack.—“Fools!” cried the cool and experienced Caleb Allee, “do you forget that the cattle and the baggage are driven before the principal body of their young men and warriors?—see you not that if you once get among them, you will get entangled and bewildered, and may lose your prize and the day by your foolish impatience?—Wait till their guards come up—strike the shepherds, the sheep are yours of course.”—At length the shouting and the tumult rose closer on the ear; our troops were plainly pressing upon their prey, and Caleb Allee no longer delayed the eagerly expected word. “Bismillah! set on!” cried he, and the whole thundered forward with a tremendous shout. The effect was decisive; the Koords attacked thus unexpectedly in rear as well as in front, were confounded, and fell into utter confusion. Still they fought well; a powerful troop in particular, which succeeded in forming under a Shadloo chief, offered a very formidable resistance, and threatened to break through the circle with which they were surrounded. Stimulated by the presence of my commander, I joined in a sharp charge upon this body, who, like lions at bay, made every one who approached pay dear for his temerity. Forgetful of my weakness I rushed blindly on, until I found myself opposed to a Koord of gigantic stature mounted on a powerful horse. However good my will might be, my strength was insufficient to second it, or even to manage my horse and weapons with effect;—even Boorank appeared to be infected by his master’s debility; he stumbled and was borne backward in the shock, and both

overthrown, but unwounded, we rolled on the plain among the dead and the dying.

For a few minutes I lay stunned under the trampling feet of a hundred horses, but quite insensible to my danger: perhaps this proved my safety, for, when I recollected myself and arose, the battle had rolled past, and I was assisted by two men of the guard, who had orders, they said, to take care of me. I did not however require their farther aid, the fresh air restored my senses; and though mortified at the weakness which had led to my overthrow, and which was by no means decreased by the fall, I mounted again, and held forward to join the pursuit and witness the full success of our well-concerted measures.

It was complete enough; a great proportion of the enemy's armed men were cut to pieces, and the little plain on the rivulet's bank was strewed with their dead and wounded. Some chiefs of importance were made prisoners, along with several women belonging to families of note; and there was a host of inferior captives, with a great quantity of cattle, sheep, and baggage. A small portion only of the whole made good their way into Khabooshan, whither they carried with them terror and dismay. Had Nader been anxious to follow up his success and reduce the town, it would hardly have resisted for a single day; but considerations of a more pressing nature called him to the north-eastward, and he deferred to a more convenient season the punishment due to its turbulent inhabitants.

While slowly and painfully I joined my corps, now retiring from pursuit and reuniting under Caleb Allee Beg, that officer observed and addressed me.—“Behold, young man, the enervating effects, the mortifying consequences of debauchery! Would Ismael have suffered so egregious a defeat had not vice and folly destroyed his strength and robbed him of the skill and activity he once possessed? Strive, young man, to efface the recollection of your guilty madness, and to regain your lost vigour, if you would shun still greater disgrace in the face of the foe.” I felt the bitter justice of the words; but the compliment implied in them blunted the sarcasm, and made

me half forget the discomfiture I had sustained. I resolved, however, to be more cautious until returning strength should enable me to follow the dictates of courage without the hazard of defeat.

The policy of Nader was now clear, and eminently successful. The defeat of these Koords depressed the spirits of the whole rebel party, and opened an easy way to Dereguz, where his brother Ibrahim was still closely beleaguered. A few of the fugitives had found their way to the camp of the combined troops before that place and spread no small consternation among them by an exaggerated account of the power which had overthrown themselves, and which was now in full march to fall upon the rest of their foes. The General did not lose much time in taking advantage of this impression; for on the very evening of this action he marched four fursungs on the road to Dereguz.

Early next morning the army was again in motion, and its strength was increased during its progress by the junction of several detachments; but after all, in point of numbers it was inferior to that of the rebels. It was the intention of Nader to surprise his enemy, if possible, by the rapidity of his movements; but on approaching Dereguz, we learned by our scouts that their alarm was already complete, and that they were quite prepared to give us a warm reception. We therefore halted about half a fursung distant from the camp, and waited for the light of morning to attack them. As night came on, picquets and scouts were posted in advance to watch the enemy's motions; a careful guard was kept in every quarter; and the soldiers lay down to rest upon their arms, ready to start up on the least alarm.

The importance of such precautions, which never were neglected by the wary and experienced Nader, was sufficiently demonstrated upon this occasion; for the rebels, who had often experienced the might of his arm and the valour of his troops when fighting under their General's eye, began to lose confidence in their superior numbers, and resolved to try what might be effected by stratagem. They hoped that our soldiers, fatigued by a long march, might be found less upon the alert than usual; that, there-

fore, they should be able to steal upon us undiscovered, and cripple the strength of the whole army, if not utterly destroy it.—They were miserably deceived. Our men had received orders to muster in arms an hour before daylight; but long before that time a sentinel from the rear came hastily in to say, that he was confident there was a body of horse approaching in that quarter, for that he had heard the heavy though distant trampling of hoofs, as he watched at his post. The tale appeared so improbable to the officer whom he had roused, that he was dismissing the man to his post with a severe reprimand for leaving it, when the hum of voices rising in many parts of the line announced that a similar alarm had been communicated to others. Doubt and hesitation began to prevail, when Nader, who was invariably apprised of even the smallest causes of alarm, and who, no doubt, had kept on the alert himself this night, approached hastily, attended only by one or two of his guard, and issued orders for the whole army to prepare for receiving the enemy without a moment's delay. Seconding his words, he rode himself to the several quarters of the camp, rousing the commanders of the different troops, and enjoining the preservation of perfect silence; while the men were formed without the loss of a moment. With so much alertness was this effected, that in a quarter of an hour the greater number of the troops were under arms, and waited but the order to move; by that time, too, all doubt as to the cause of the sentinel's alarm was at an end: it was plain to the senses of all, that a strong body of armed men, both horse and foot, were approaching us in rear, and dispositions were silently made to receive them. A good quantity of baggage, tents, and other lumber, which had been deposited in the rear of our position, was hastily placed in such a manner as to embarrass the enemy's advance, should they attempt to charge in upon the camp; and the troops intended to check them were withdrawn behind this barricado, ready, upon a given signal, to assail them with their matchlocks and arrows.

Presently we could distinguish through the gloom small groups of figures on foot, who appeared to be exploring the way; and beyond these a dark and confused mass

rose gradually to view, from whence the faint clash of arms, or the ringing of a bridle-chain, might now and then be heard to issue—the only interruption to the deep silence which was preserved on either side.

The dense and moving mass now spread out before us, so as to occupy an extensive space, and advanced, but still with caution,—for their guides, or precursors, did not appear to be confident of their ground; perhaps they distrusted the perfect stillness which reigned throughout our camp. But probably the impatience of the main body was not to be longer controlled; for after a little wavering, we could see an universal movement among them, which was succeeded by the thunder of innumerable hoofs, and down they all came upon us. At this moment the flash of a single zumbooruk* issued from the centre of our line; it was the signal of assault, and its report was succeeded by a volley from the whole camel artillery, which, crouched on their knees behind some rubbish, opened their masked battery upon the advancing foe. A roar of matchlocks instantly succeeded, the flashes of which illuminated the darkness, and, accompanied with thick flights of arrows, poured destruction on the assailants. Confounded at a reception they had not expected, they reined up their horses, and halted; but not until they had got entangled among our tents and baggage, in which condition a part of our troops sallied out upon them, sword in hand, and cut a great many to pieces. But although they were surprised and greatly disconcerted, there were among them too many chiefs of note, and too many brave soldiers, to yield us so easy a victory; Shah-verdee Khan Shadloo, and Mahomed Hoossein Khan Zafferanloo, cutting their way through those of our soldiers who opposed them, called their gholaums and followers around them, and animated their troops by shouting out their war-cries with a loud voice. Having disengaged themselves from the confusion in our front, they retreated a short way to recover and re-form their array under cover of the darkness; but our troops, flushed with success, were unwilling to allow them to perform this

* A swivel gun mounted on the back of a camel.

manœuvre in quietness, and several corps, regardless of the orders of their commanders, unheeding even the voice of Nader in their madness, rushed forward upon their retreating enemy.

Their ill-judged zeal met with a speedy punishment ; for no sooner had they advanced beyond the line and shelter of the encampment, than a strong body of Koords and Toorkomans, who had not suffered in their first miscarriage, galloped up from behind, and taking our people in flank, handled them very roughly. It became expedient to send succour to these rash men ; and this again called forth an additional effort on the other side ; so that, instead of the enemy being permitted to retire with their first loss, to renew the assault, if they chose, with broken spirits by daylight, a desultory action took place between the armies, which was maintained with considerable loss, but with no decisive effect, on either side.

Before the break of day, we discovered that the attack upon our rear had by no means been made with the whole of the rebel force ; for just as objects began to be distinguishable, a loud shouting in front announced an assault in that quarter ; and a part of the troops who had not hitherto been engaged were sent to repel it. The indefatigable Nader, near whose person I had continued from the time when his arrangements were complete, flew instantly to face the danger and support the onset ; and we arrived just in time to rally a corps of Beyauts, who, sorely pressed by a powerful body of the Diroom Toorkomans, were beginning to give way. Hope and courage came to them with the shout of Nader, and in a moment his terrible battle-axe was gleaming in the face of their assailants. There were not twenty people along with us, but the impression we produced was worth ten times the number. Still, however, fresh succours poured in to their assistance, and our situation became critical. I forgot my weakness, and kept my place, fighting by the General's side, until I saw that his glance, which hitherto had passed me over with mortifying indifference, rested on me at length, more than once, with a gleam of approbation. But the enemy pressing us still more closely, he called to me, " Ismael, stand firm,—to you and to Saadut Allee

Nassackchee* I commit this post ; maintain it with your lives until I return, as I shall do immediately with assistance." With these words he struck his stirrups into his horse's sides, and galloped away, while Saadut Allee and I, excited to the utmost by the confidence reposed in us, redoubled our efforts, and fought like Zal and Roostun.† But the odds against us were too great ; the Toorkomans came on in swarms, like very devils, and our men, who were falling thickly, began to give way. "Hoh, friends!" cried I, in despair at the thought of losing the post that was so emphatically entrusted to me, "is this the way you strike for the great Nader?—come on, Saadut Allee, and let us show these cowards how to cleave a rebel to the girdle." On this, goring our horses with our stirrups, and waving our swords aloft, we both threw ourselves upon the foremost of the enemy, and I was lucky enough to overthrow and cut down a chief who was encouraging them in front, while my companion laid about him so manfully, that they gave back a little. Twenty or thirty men now followed us, but the rest still hesitated, and we thus were almost separated from our friends. Just then a spear, from the hand of a Toorkoman, struck Saadut Allee in the side, and while turning to revenge the blow, he received an arrow in the temple. Springing upwards from his horse, he fell forward in the throng, and I saw him no more ; and beyond all doubt, myself and the remains of my party would soon have shared his fate, had not very unexpected succour appeared at this critical moment.

A loud shout at a little distance in our front was followed by confusion and irresolution among our opponents :—the violence of their assault diminished,—they wavered and gradually gave way, for they were themselves attacked in rear. Ibrahim Khan, when by the light of morning he could see how matters stood, and distinguish friend from foe, sallied from the fort, and, attacking in his turn, caused a diversion which at once changed the face of affairs ; and however the fortune of the day might have

* Executioner—always an attendant on a chief ; often an officer of no small rank.

† Two famous heroes, celebrated in the *Shahnameh* of Ferdows.

turned without his interference, this well-judged measure at once secured it in our favour.

The enemy in our front now broke and fled in great confusion, so that, breathing for a while from the mortal struggle, we had time to look around and attend to the state of the field, and I was so fortunate as to cut off the retreat of a considerable number which our charge in advance had partly intercepted : among the rest we secured the person of Solymaun Khan, a chief of the first consequence, and one of the principal leaders of the rebels. Scarcely had this been effected, when the General, not yet aware of his brother's successful sally, came spurring up to our assistance with a party of his guards, just as the impetuous Ibrahim, cutting a path with his bloody sword, and scattering the fugitives to right and left, charged up to our very breasts, and checked his powerful horse till its haunches almost touched the ground, in surprise at finding himself among his friends.

Busily occupied in securing my prisoners, I knew not who was near me until roused by the loud and cheerful voice of Ibrahim shouting his thanks and congratulations to his brother. "Ho ! by the head of your Highness and the holy Caaba ! this is as it should be !—By the blessing of God and the power of your own good star, my brother, you have done a worthy deed this day ! and well is it my part to thank you for it,—for the Ghorumsaug* held me sore at bay, and long have I looked for the glancing of your zumbooruks this morning !—But whom have we here ? That idle rake Ismael ? and once more employed as he should be—and his dress of the right colour too ! Barikillah ! my boy, I rejoice to see it," casting his eyes significantly on my clothes which were covered with blood.

"Thrice welcome he who comes in season !" replied Nader :—"My brother, you have done your duty—that was a well-timed sally—it did us excellent service. But, Bismillah !—lose no time—pursue, exterminate the rebellious slaves ; let them find what it is to be ever thus in

* Rascals.

arms against their sovereign, ever disturbing the peace and tranquillity of the country !”

“Bechushm !” said Ibrahim, putting his hand to his eyes ; and, dashing his stirrups into his horse’s flanks, he thundered after the flying foe. “For you, young man, you have this time done your duty well, if you never had neglected it—for lost confidence is not soon regained.—But pursue your present course, and be assured my eye is upon you. Conduct your prisoners now to the fortress, secure them under a fitting guard, and let no one have access to them without our especial order.”

Exhausted as I was with the continued exertion of three days’ active duty, this order was by no means unwelcome, and the few words that accompanied it were more gratifying to me than the highest praise from any other quarter. The day was far advanced before pursuit was over ; many hundreds of the rebels were destroyed, and several villages in the neighbourhood pillaged and burnt, as a warning to others against disaffection for the future. It was evening before the army was fully collected, and his Highness took possession of the quarters prepared for his reception.

Brightly next morning did the lord of day shed his rays over hill and valley ; but the eyes of many a rebel, which hailed his early beams, were quenched in darkness or in death before he set. The first light of dawn shown upon the solemn pomp of Nader’s military court of justice. The same ominous array of guards and executioners, the like groups of wretched prisoners and their stern attendants, brought forcibly to my remembrance the striking circumstances of my first introduction to the hero, whose fortunes I had from that time followed. Nader, at all times strict and severe, on this occasion exercised a degree of harshness, amounting, as some might think, to cruelty, towards the captive rebels. Eager to engage in enterprizes of more importance, from which the unceasing disturbances of these districts alone detained him, he resolved to strike a lasting terror into the turbulent tribes, and to cripple their power, so as to secure himself from any annoyance in this quarter, when he should be engaged at a distance. A certain number of the chiefs, and the

choice of their followers, were incorporated with the various bodies of his troops ; but many were given up to the sword of the executioner. Some were deprived of their eyes, and others, yet more shockingly maimed, were suffered to linger out their lives in misery.

Among those who were numbered with the blind, was my unhappy prisoner, Solymaun Khan : his appeals for mercy were vain. To me, as his conqueror, he turned with an earnestness of entreaty that wrung my heart ; but the pleading look which I directed to the general, was replied to by a glance of stern denial. The fatal signal was given, and when he rose from the earth, the light of his countenance was gone for ever, and two bleeding, eyeless sockets, alone remained.—“ Oh, kill me ! put me to death at once ! ” gasped the wretched man ; “ what have I to do with life, when all that made it sweet is gone ? Pitiless tyrant ! ” added he, turning his sightless face towards the tent of Nader, “ take heed to thyself ! thy course is prosperous now, but the guilt of blood is on thee, and the mercy thou hast this day denied, may be refused to thyself at thy need ! Many a light hast thou quenched ; but the day will come when thy own soul shall be darkened, and the misery thou hast poured on others shall flow back upon thyself.” The Furoshes in waiting would not suffer him to proceed ; they struck him on the mouth with their iron-heeled slippers, till the blood flowed from his lips, and hurried him from the presence ;—but all who heard him shuddered at his words : even Nader was moved, and sought in vain to conceal the trouble of his mind under a frown of more than wonted gloom.

When matters at Dereguz were duly arranged, the General proceeded to reduce the town of Khabooshan, and punish the rebellious tribes of Koordistan and the Attock, while his brother Ibrahim was despatched to chastise the tribes who had taken possession of Merve and raised the standard of rebellion in the name of Melek Mahmood Seistanee, the late usurper of Mushed. After no small trouble, and in spite of repeated instances of treachery on the part of the enemy, this object was at last effected, and another victim delivered to the sword of justice, in the person of Melek ; who, although he had

been spared by the clemency of his Highness, after the capture of Mushed, had given sufficient proof, by engaging in a succession of dangerous intrigues, that his death was essential to the tranquillity of the country. On this expedition, which I knew was likely to be attended with much fatigue and danger, I sought and obtained permission to accompany Ibrahim Khan. I was desirous to prove to him that my late follies and habits of self-indulgence had not destroyed the energies of my mind, nor the hardihood of my body; and I was so fortunate as to recover the place which I had well nigh lost in the regard of my frank and warm hearted patron, who made such report of me to his brother, for renewed steadiness and zeal, that I began once more to feel myself in the enjoyment of that esteem and consideration, which for a time I had deservedly forfeited.

CHAPTER XL.

THE DISCIPLINE OF NADER.

MANY months were occupied in reducing the northern and eastern parts of the province to a safe and settled state, but during all that time his Highness never lost sight of his greater and more important objects. The strength of the army was increased, and the details of its regulations and discipline were more completely organized, while the constant employment of its different divisions against rebellious governors or refractory tribes, kept alive the courage of the soldiers, and inured them to war and fatigue.

The power of Nader's mind was no less conspicuous in these details than in schemes of more extended policy; never was any man more qualified by nature for a general. The striking influence he possessed over the minds of the soldiery was a peculiar attribute of his person, which he increased and maintained by a careful attention to their wants, and an indulgence, which, however, was never permitted to interfere with the strictness of his discipline. Wo to the purveyors whose division should be

found ill-supplied with food upon a march!—well might they tremble when cited before the General by the complaints of their officers, for he never forgave wilful inattention or neglect; even a reasonable excuse would not always content him. His maxim was, that soldiers cannot do their duty without food, and must be supplied, cost what it may. A complaint of this nature was lodged on one occasion against two persons whom he had directed to collect a store of grain from certain villages between Subzawar and Jahjerm,* and who, by failing in their duty, had subjected the detachment for which it was intended, to the risk of a miscarriage. The men assured his Highness that the fault lay not with them, but with the Ketkhodahs, who refused to furnish the grain, and who, when threatened with his Highness' displeasure, beat them and drove them away from their gates. "They did not beat you half enough," coolly replied Nader, "but I will make up for their deficiency." They were seized, and their feet beat to a jelly; and Nader, while they were roaring with pain, turned to some of those about him and observed, "There is no listening to such ghorumsaugs! These fellows, now, thought I would punish the Ketkhodahs!—the fools! they know they can have whatever assistance they want to enforce my orders, and yet they think thus to laugh at my beard! At this rate I should have all my purveyors taking bribes from the Ketkhodahs, and getting their own necks out of the scrape, while these wretches would be left to answer for themselves to me."—We had no more complaints of that kind during the campaign.

Even when it was obvious that a failure had been inevitable from the force of circumstances, and when the explanations brought forward were evidently founded in truth, he sometimes would not be satisfied. "The soldier must feel himself protected," would he say, "or how can I look for his confidence? he does not reason, he only feels that hunger must be satisfied, or that he cannot do his duty; and if we cannot get him food, we must pacify him by punishing those whom he believes to be in fault."

* Two towns of Khorasan.

Thus he would sometimes punish a purveyor for a failure which he could not help, and send him the next day a present, or a khelut, by way of amends.

But notwithstanding his well-known strictness in these matters, persons were sometimes found so insane as to add the crime of peculation to neglect of duty, and seek to enjoy their own gratifications at the public expense, while those whose comfort was placed in their charge was suffering absolute want. When such cases came under his cognizance, his fury was uncontrollable, and the punishments he inflicted on the offenders were terrible. I remember on one occasion his unexpectedly joining a division of the army which in general was attached to the camp of the Shah, and finding that the soldiers were ill-supplied with grain, and forced to purchase wholesome food at an extravagant rate. The persons whose duty it was to supply the bazaar were immediately sent for, and while themselves were undergoing a strict examination, their dwellings were searched with equal severity : the stores of grain and choice food of different descriptions found there, sufficiently declared that, however neglectful of the soldiers' comfort, they had amply provided for their own. The trembling wretches attempted to excuse themselves, but were sternly stopped by the General. " By the head of the Prophet ! I wonder not that the enemies of the King should prosper, and rebels abound, when the soldiers of the state are starved by vermin like you, who fatten on the meat they should eat ; but I will teach you and the like of you, to feed upon pillaw and kubaubs, while my soldiers are in want even of bread and sour milk ! " He issued his orders ; the stores of the miserable wretches were distributed among the soldiers, and they themselves, bound hand and foot, were thrust into a small apartment, the door of which was then built up with brick and mortar. No one dared to expostulate, nor did any one venture to approach the place for ten days, when it was opened by order of the General, and disclosed a horrid spectacle. One of the poor creatures had died before the rest, and the other two had endeavoured to assuage the pangs of hunger by feeding on his body. No contractor was willing to come forward after this ; but Nader ap-

pointed such persons as he thought fit for the office, and I need not add that no money was made by them, and that corn was afterwards as cheap in this camp as in any part of the country.

He could not endure to see even his officers enjoying themselves in plenty, when the soldiers were in want. I have heard him abuse, in the grossest terms, a party whom he found after a hard march rejoicing in the prospect of a hearty meal upon a sheep they had found means to secure, while their followers had not bread. He upbraided them with selfishness and neglect of duty, in taking their ease while their men were unprovided for;—nay he forced them to give up their spoil to satisfy the cravings of the hungry soldiers. I remember him putting a certain Mimbashée into confinement without food for the night, after a severe day's duty, for a similar offence: it is true he sent him a suit of chain armour and a fine Herât scymetar the next day, with a hint to look more carefully after the comforts of his men for the future; for the man was a brave officer, and in no small favour, in spite of the lesson which his Highness thought fit thus to give him.

In truth, the General never required of others more than he did himself. Often has he divided the last maun* of bread in his family, with those of his soldiers who could not otherwise be served; and in times of scarcity he never would admit of a distinction in favour of himself or his household, but received for them and for himself the same allowance that was served out to the soldiers, making a meal himself upon a few handfuls of parched peas. This solicitude for the comfort of the troops, which was extended to insuring them a corresponding regularity in the issue of pay, clothing, and other accommodations, won for him their confidence and affection, and enabled him to maintain that strictness of discipline which had for many years been unknown among the armies of Persia.

But, however tenacious on the score of discipline, there were times when Nader cared but little how far the soldiers carried their excesses in plunder or rapine. When they were marching through the territory of a rebel or an

* A measure of 7 1-4lbs. English weight.

enemy, or when a town had been taken by storm, all was usually considered as fair game, and the soldier was called but slightly to account for his conduct, provided he was found at his post when duty required it. Nevertheless, when it was his pleasure to command that all deeds of violence should be abstained from, and that the troops should proceed in peace and good order, woe to the man who was found trespassing in any point! His punishments, upon such occasions, were severe in proportion to his usual indulgence.

A Gholaum in no small favour with the General had sallied forth upon a foraging party in the friendly district of Nishapore, which it was the policy as well as the wish of Nader to conciliate, and laid hold of two goats, the only property of a poor peasant; who, on remonstrating and attempting to recover his beasts, received a severe beating into the bargain, from the thief and his myrmidons. It happened, that when the poor wretch came to make his complaint, the Gholaum who had ill-used him was on duty, and knowing his errand, denied him access to the tent of his Highness: but the man persevered, and made so loud a noise as to attract the notice of the General, who, inquiring into the matter, ordered him to be brought near. He related his story, and proved it to be true in spite of the positive denials of the Gholaum. "Son!" said Nader, "I presume from the nature of your conduct that you are tired of my service; I shall therefore promote you according to your deserts into that of another. Here, fellow," continued he, addressing the peasant, "here is a slave for thee; I give him to thee in lieu of thy two goats; see that he works out their value to thee: if he gets out of thy clutches without ample payment, thou art a fool." The man, not comprehending the General's meaning, believed that his suit was rejected, that his Highness was only making game of him, and he was withdrawing in sorrow and confusion; but he was soon made sensible of his mistake, and left the presence carrying with him his new slave, with whom he readily agreed for a ransom of thirty tomauns, to be paid by the sale of all he had. When Nader heard of the arrangement, he sent again for the parties. "Well,

friend, are you content?"—"May your Highness' prosperity increase! I have every reason to be so." "Well; you have let him off cheaply—you may go your ways:—though you may be satisfied, I am not." The culprit, who, unhappy wretch! expected after this exhibition of justice to be restored to favour, was now brought forward,—his infraction of discipline was yet to be atoned for; and accordingly, after receiving a severe bastinado in full view of the troops, his ears were ordered to be cut off, and himself turned out of camp, as a warning to all such illicit plunderers.

Courage and enterprize were the qualities which alone could disarm the wrath of Nader when excited by such misdemeanours: and though these could not at all times induce him to forgive a breach of discipline, they certainly pleaded with him powerfully in favour of their possessors; as, on the other hand, a sneaking and unmanly behaviour tended to exasperate him. I remember an instance in point, which may be worth relating. There was a certain person, an Affshar of his own tribe, who had risen by his own valour and merit from the station of a common groom to be a Dehbashee* in Nader's guard. In a hot engagement with the Toorkomans, a Dehbashee, who, as is customary in some corps, carried a small flag on the point of his spear, happened to be killed, and his men, overpowered by numbers, were retreating, leaving this banner in the hands of their enemies. This person, at that time a common soldier, calling out to his comrades to stand firm, rushed alone against the advancing Toorkomans, and made such good use of his sword, that he not only forced them to give back, and gave time for his own friends to rally and come on, but he recovered the flag, and bore it off in triumph; and Nader, pleased with his zeal and courage, immediately gave him a right to carry the trophy he had so gallantly won.

This man, accompanied by a few soldiers, was sent by his Highness to receive the contribution of a certain village, with strict orders to communicate with no one but the Ketkhodah, and not to remain in the place longer than

* Commander of ten men.

might be required for the performance of his errand. Unhappily for himself, the Dehbashee was not insensible to the comforts of good cheer, and liked good wine better than a pious Mussulmaun should do. The Ketkhodah, in hopes of contriving to relieve himself of a part of the contribution, prevailed on the officer to wait and partake of a good lamb pillaw, while the money and other articles should be collected; but the latter not choosing to expose his trespass to the eyes of his men, sent them to wait his arrival at a certain place, where he promised soon to join them. The pillaw was excellent; a merry fellow, one of the villagers, dropped in, with one or two more, and told some capital stories; and their host, closing the doors with mysterious caution, produced a large carboy of excellent Nishapore wine. Whether the Dehbashee was more than commonly thirsty, or the wine more than usually potent, or whether the Ketkhodah had drugged it for the purpose, was never discovered; but the former soon lost his senses, and did not recover them until the morning of the next day, when he had some difficulty in recollecting where he was, and what his errand had been.

The Ketkhodah now found little difficulty in making his own terms; for the Dehbashee was confused, ashamed, and, in some degree, in his power. His despair was completed, when, on reaching the place of appointment, he found none of his party there. They had remained, as desired, until late at night, when, confounded at the protracted absence of their chief, and supposing that he must have missed his way in the darkness, they returned to head-quarters, where they were still more astonished to find he had not yet arrived.

After musing for a while, the poor fellow resolved to go at once to the General, and tell him the whole affair without attempting any excuse. "Let him do what he will with me," said he mentally; "it is better than skulking or telling a lie about it, or than being at the mercy of a knave like the Ketkhodah." So to his Highness he went, and found him in bad humour enough; for the fact of his absence, and the arrival of his men without their officer had just been reported. "How!—does the fellow dare to appear in our presence?" growled Nader, with a terrible frown;

"take him and bastinado him soundly, and strip him of his armour, and turn him out of camp."—"Very good, your Highness," replied the man; "but you may as well listen to your slave's report, and take the money he has brought from the village; the grain and other things have already been delivered."—"Say on, fellow," replied Nader: "but if you prevaricate in the smallest degree, it shall be worse for you."—"Your slave is a plain man," said the Dehbashee, "and will tell the truth exactly: do with him afterwards as may seem good to your Highness." He told his tale; its simplicity sufficiently vouched for its correctness, and the gloom on the General's visage diminished. "Well, you great drunken fool! and so my orders are to be disobeyed, your duty neglected, and the public service to go to the devil, that you may stuff that hide of yours with lamb pillaw and wine! How is discipline to be maintained at this rate? You cannot be pardoned, nor can I trust you any longer."—"Your slave did not expect to be pardoned; but he never thought of leaving your Highness' service. Had I been content to do so, and thought but of saving myself, I needed not to have returned to your presence. I had a good horse, and money enough; my arm and my sword would always have won me service; nor was I far from the frontier, which once passed I was safe enough. All this was in my power on the one hand, and punishment in view upon the other, if I remained; yet I returned to the feet of your Highness. Of my trustworthiness your Highness can judge, by recollecting how often I have neglected my duty; and when you want a stout arm to strike a strong blow, perhaps you may remember Assad Allee Mehtur."* With these words he turned, and nodding to the Nassukchee near him, said, "Come on! I am ready."

"Hear that ghorumsaug now," said Nader, with a half-pleased, half-sarcastic laugh; "he thinks we cannot win a battle without his help! After all, the rascal is a good soldier. Hark! you, Assad Allee; you have forgotten your duty, disobeyed orders, and neglected the public service: were you my own brother, so flagrant a breach of

* *Mehtur*, signifies a groom.

discipline should not go unpunished : but you shall not want an opportunity to redeem your character. Before long, Insh-allah ! we shall come to blows with these accursed Koords—may their fathers roast in hell !—let me then see you bear yourself as you once did, and we shall try what can be done for you—till then you are deprived of your office as Dehbashee :—go !”

The promised opportunity was soon obtained, and Assad Allee was not the man to neglect it. When the engagement began, he rode up to his Highness, and kept his eye upon him. A furious charge was made upon the left by a well-mounted and chosen body of Koords.—“ Now is your time,” exclaimed Nader, pointing to the breach which they had made in our line—“ Bero !*—there is your chance !”—“ Bechushm !” answered Assad Allee, and clapping stirrups to his horse’s flanks, and shouting aloud, he dashed among the assailants. His strength and impetuosity produced an immediate effect : the foremost of the Koords, already checked in their career by the resistance they had met with at first, were overthrown with violence, and their fall embarrassed those behind ; the line recovered from their momentary confusion, and Assad Allee succeeded in securing two heads at his saddle-bow.

He had cut down a third from his horse, and was endeavouring to make sure of this additional trophy, when the Koords rallying in their turn, closed their ranks around him, and shut him out from view of his companions. Every one now believed him to be lost, and even Nader, who had kept his eye upon him, was hastily roaring out to spur to his assistance, when the throng of Koords once more opened out, and Assad Allee galloped through the gap, cutting furiously to the right and left, in possession of his three heads, but bleeding in streams from a desperate gash across the face, and severe cuts upon his left arm and thigh. Still holding on his course, he never drew bridle till he reached the point where Nader stood, surrounded by his officers, when, instantly dismounting, he laid the gory heads at his master’s feet, and sank on the ground

* Bero ! “ begone !”

there himself, quite exhausted by loss of blood. "I think I was right in keeping that fellow in my service," said he significantly to Caleb Allee Beg, who was close to him : "let him be carefully looked after ; by the beard of Allee ! he is worth it all." When Assad Allee recovered of his wounds, he was made a Sudeval,* with the rank of Beg ; and not very long after, rose to the command of five hundred men.

Far different was the fate of another delinquent, of no mean rank, who was detected in purloining a set of silver-embroidered horse-trappings, and some brocaded ornaments, from a merchant in the bazaar of Mushed.† It occurred at a time when Nader was particularly desirous to conciliate the inhabitants of the capital, from whom he expected to receive important assistance towards certain objects he had then in view. The merchant complained to his Highness, and, to the confusion of the wretched delinquent, who believed himself secure even from suspicion, brought along with him sufficient evidence of the fact. Long did the deluded man attempt to prevaricate, and even to deny his guilt with indignation ; nor was it until confronted and detected in every subterfuge that he took to change his ground. But when all was fully proved, he became as mean and cringing as he had at first been confident and indignant. He entreated for mercy in the most abject terms ; and when he saw contempt and indignation darkening the brow of Nader, he turned to his accuser, and besought him, with all the earnestness of terror, to plead in his behalf. The effort was worse than vain, for the disgust which his conduct inspired, exasperated the displeasure of his judge, and increased the severity of his punishment. He was delivered over to the executioners, with orders to deprive him of his right hand, to cut off his ears, and setting him on an ass, with his head towards the tail, to lead him, thus mutilated through all the principal streets and bazaars of Mushed, proclaiming

* Commander of an hundred men.

† Such a crime in a person of such rank may strike the European reader with astonishment, but such meannesses are common enough in Persia among all ranks, particularly as the highest officers of state often rise from the lowest stations in life.

before him that such was the manner in which his Highness thought fit to punish a pitiful and cowardly thief.

So rigid were the notions of Nader on the subject of military conduct, that he made it a rule never to continue an officer who had frequently been unfortunate, in commands of importance; and he would often punish with severity those who failed in an enterprize, without making very particular inquiry into the cause of their miscarriage—for it was a maxim with his Highness, that when no overwhelming disparity of force exists, discomfitures more frequently proceed from gross mistakes, neglect of the proper military precautions, or infractions of discipline, than from any other cause; and these he considered as inexcusable in officers honoured with his confidence. A striking instance of this inflexibility of principle was given in his conduct to his own brave and excellent brother, Ibrahim Khan, after his loss of the battle of Kermaighan. The Zohire-u-dowlut* had been sent with a large force to punish certain tribes of rebel Koords and Toorkomans who had mustered in arms near Semulghan, and bade defiance to the officers of government who were sent to collect the revenue. He met and engaged them at a place named Kermaighan; but his troops, dispirited by the treacherous desertion of certain friendly Koordish Chiefs and their followers, and being sorely pressed by superior numbers, at length broke and fled; and Ibrahim found no small difficulty in rallying a small party, with which he made good his retreat into the fort of Youz-bashee, which was fortunately in his rear. From thence, after having been closely invested for three or four days, he escaped by night, and made the best of his way to meet his brother, who had gone to chastise the Yamoot, the Tekeh, and the Salour Toorkomans in the Desert; and who having put many of them to death, destroying also their villages and much cultivation, was returning in triumph when he heard of the disaster at Kermaighan.

So soon as Ibrahim entered his presence, he upbraided him bitterly with imprudence and want of circumspection,

* It will be recollected that this appellation, signifying "the supporter of the state," had been bestowed upon Ibrahim Khan.

from which causes alone, he insisted, the disaster had proceeded. "In whom can I repose confidence," said he sternly, "if I find myself deceived in my opinion of you? With the troops which you commanded, I have fought many a battle and gained as many victories. I never saw them turn their backs to the foe; nor would you have had to complain of them now, had they been confident in their leader. But that headlong and boyish rashness against which I have so often warned you, defeats the efforts of courage, and renders zeal a dangerous quality. How should soldiers follow one whose actions prove him to be a child, while his beard would declare him a man?"

Ibrahim, who hung his head from shame and mortification at the condition in which he was forced to appear before his brother, raised a glance of reproach and indignation at these severe and in truth unmerited sarcasms: but he repressed the keen retort that rose to his lips, and casting once more his eyes upon the ground, replied with an air of proud humility, "It is the misfortune of your servant to have offended your Highness; he disputes not the degree of his guilt, nor deprecates his punishment. May your Highness find servants more faithful and successful than Ibrahim!" Nader only replied with a look; and so perfect was his command of countenance, that nothing was to be detected there beyond a fixed determination to perform his duty: yet some of those about his person, who knew him best, declared that they could trace a quivering of the muscles, which indicated a painful internal struggle. He turned to Caleb Allee Beg, "I give you charge of the Khan's person; see that he is kept in close confinement until farther orders." Ibrahim bowed low, with his hand placed on his breast as duty requires to a superior, and left the presence in charge of Caleb Allee, without another word.

But though the General's systematic devotion to military rules and discipline induced him to put a force upon his feelings, and to show the world that not even for the sake of his own brother would he sacrifice a single point of his principles, Nader loved that brother too sincerely, and was too anxious to see him again in his proper place, at the head of his troops, to permit his long continuance

under arrest : in fact, Ibrahim was too much a favourite with the soldiers to render such a measure safe or politic. Before a week passed, he received a khelut and his liberty ; and Ibrahim understood his brother's sentiments too well to take offence at a conduct which, though harsh in appearance, was perhaps required for the preservation of that discipline to which so much of his military success was due.

CHAPTER XII.

PROGRESS OF A CONQUEROR.

It was not until the commencement of A. H. 1141 (A. D. 1728) that tranquillity was so firmly established in Khorasan as to allow his Highness to commence with vigour the great enterprize he had so long contemplated—the expulsion of the Affghaun usurpers from Persia. The encroachments of the Abdallee Affghauns first occupied his attention. The fierce tribes who bear that name, and who inhabit the country round Herat, united under the command of Mahomed Khan, had not only possessed themselves of that city, and thrown off their allegiance to the Persian crown, but had even carried their audacity so far, in A. H. 1135, as to attempt the siege of Mushed itself ; and though they were foiled in their ambitious hopes, and forced to retreat to their own territories by the change of affairs in Khorasan, they still continued their invasions on the eastern parts of the province, and harassed the inhabitants by the most daring acts of plunder and hostility. The repression of such outrages, therefore, was a measure which his Highness felt it incumbent on him to carry into effect.

This, however, was not the first occasion on which the victorious troops of his Highness were called upon to measure their strength with that of the fierce Abdallees. More than twelve months before this period, the insolence of certain Affghaun chiefs of Seistan, who had invaded Kayn, a city of Khorasan, had provoked the wrath of Nader, and he marched against them with an army of eight

thousand men, and a small train of artillery. Hoossein Sultaun, the principal leader of the enemy, abandoned by his associates, who fled to Sultaun Ashruff at Ispahan, shut himself up in his castle at the conqueror's approach, but soon found it expedient to submit to his mercy. Nader, upon this, resolved to follow up the blow, by punishing certain tribes of Affghauns inhabiting the districts around Herat. The journey through the Desert was attended with extreme difficulty; and the troops were subjected to a degree of hardship which can hardly be conceived. It was in the month of August, and a portion of the way lay through a sandy desert entirely destitute of water, the light particles of which were constantly set in motion by the parching wind that blew over its surface. Here the sufferings of the men were intense: exhausted with thirst and fatigue, it was with great difficulty they could drag themselves along, and the necessary equipment of arms and provisions became an intolerable burden. In vain did their officers encourage them by exhortation and example; they were powerless; their inflamed and bloodshot eyes, their parched throats and throbbing temples, too plainly declared that the scorching sun and burning sand were enemies not to be contended with. Some of them, exhausted with heat and languor, stepped out of their ranks and lay down to die, in spite of all their comrades or commanders could do to rouse them; and in a little while they found a ready grave in the heaps of drifting sand. Others, with starting eyeballs, and tongues rattling in their dry, husky mouths, howled in furious anguish, till death or insensibility put an end to their torments. The moment a man died, his corse became putrid from intensity of heat; blood exuded from every pore; and the limbs, if touched or roughly handled, separated from the livid and fast dissolving body.

In this state of things, the difficulty of dragging along the artillery was so great, that most commanders would probably have abandoned it entirely, and turned their attention only to the means of saving the army. But the resolution of Nader was not to be shaken; he knew that the possession of artillery was essential to the success of his enterprize, and he never entertained a thought of aban-

doing either the one or the other. The guns, dismounted from their carriages, the wheels of which sank deep into the sand, were placed upon sledges hastily constructed for the occasion from such materials as the camp afforded, and to furnish which every chest and trunk was knocked to pieces. To these were yoked the strongest camels, which, assisted by a party of the freshest and ablest-bodied men, constantly relieving each other, succeeded in dragging them along. Their progress indeed was slow, and the loss both in men and in camels was great; but Nader himself superintended, and participated in the labour. Mounted on a powerful camel, he made the most indefatigable efforts, and by his perseverance, and the unbounded influence he exercised over the minds of his followers, he succeeded in stimulating them to a constancy of exertion, which, under such circumstances, was almost incredible. It is true, he lavished on the select band who performed this arduous duty, almost all the refreshments and resources the army could command. The water-skins, which had been provided and carried on camels, were drained for their use; and the moment a camel dropped from over exertion, or was strained, or split up from the uncertain footing of the sand, it was opened by these men, who obtained the store of water contained in its stomach.

He spared neither praise, threats, nor upbraidings, rewards nor punishments, but dispensed them liberally as suggested by the conduct of individuals passing beneath his eye. A Koordish soldier exerted himself so much to extricate one of the guns from a sand-wreath in which it had sunk, that the blood gushed from his nose and ears, and he fell down almost insensible. Nader, who was in the act of taking a mouthful of water, instantly ordered the man to be brought, had his burning brows bathed with the very liquid he was about to drink, and ordered him to be placed upon a camel, and taken care of. He was afterwards promoted. Not many minutes afterwards, he chastised severely with his own hand a man of his own guard, whom he detected saving himself, and shy of yielding his strength to one of the sledges which sank deep from the weight of a heavy gun. "What!" said he to the officer who had in vain tried to rouse the man to exertion, "can

you not force the rascal to yield his lazy shoulders to the task? Let me deal with him then; do you look after more honest fellows, who will not cheat their comrades, or leave them in the lurch at a pinch." The voice of the General alone had the requisite effect; but not content with this, he exercised the thong, with which he rode, upon the man's back and shoulders, till he writhed and worked away, but did not dare to utter a cry.

Two days did this scene of almost hopeless exertion continue: night yielded but faint relief, for though water was to be had by digging where we halted, it was no easy nor speedy business to procure it in sufficient quantities to satisfy the thirst of so many thousand men and cattle. Hundreds perished ere assistance could be afforded them; and the might and mercy of Allah alone, ever favouring the virtuous and the bold, enabled us to cross this dreary, fatal desert, and to reach at last the more fertile districts bordering on the territory of Herat.

There were, in these districts, many strong holds which it became necessary to reduce; and some of them gave so much trouble from the treachery, as well as the obstinate bravery of their garrisons, that we were forced to put some of them entirely to the sword, as an example to others. At length we laid siege to the strong fortress of Sunkhan, not far from Ghorian, and having received reinforcements of men and guns from Mushed, we commenced a vigorous cannonade. An event occurred during this cannonade which proved how much the sacred person of his Highness was under the special care of Providence, and showed also how surely divine justice, sooner or later, overtakes the workers of evil. He had occupied himself for a while in directing the artillery, who were engaged in levelling one of the largest guns of the train, and had but just moved a few paces away from it, when it burst, scattering destruction around. Many men were killed by the accident, and among others, Seyed Sooltaun, the chief of Diroom, who had so frequently abused the mercy of his Highness, and involved the country in confusion and bloodshed. Nader himself remained untouched, and, looking calmly around, observed with a smile to those about him, who still trembled at the danger he had

so narrowly escaped, "Ay! trust ye confidently in Nader's fortune, and be sure that neither the wit nor the wickedness of man can alter the day of destiny. In this stroke behold the arm of the Almighty, and be sure that it has fallen upon traitors alone—remove their bodies from my view." The words of his Highness were sooth,—for it was soon discovered that Seyed Sooltaun, having seduced certain Toorkoman soldiers, some of whom were killed along with him on this occasion, had entered into correspondence with the Affghaun chiefs, and had agreed to favour their efforts in a sally to be made upon our batteries, by which it was expected that we should be deprived of our artillery. Some of those engaged in the plot, struck with this interposition of Providence, confessed their treason, and thus approved the wisdom and penetration of our valiant General.

A principal tower on the wall of this fortress having been thrown down, our warriors speedily found entrance; and his Highness, irritated by many instances of bad faith on the part of the garrison, ordered every man to be put to the sword.

A few days after this success, advices were received that a large Affghaun force was approaching from the neighbourhood of Herat; and Nader lost no time in advancing to meet them. The troops of Khorasan were now, for the first time, to be opposed to these formidable enemies in a general action, and his Highness was resolved to omit no precaution calculated to secure a victory. There was no denying that the Persians, enervated by long inaction during the last reign, entertained a decided dread of the fierce and hardy Affghauns; and Nader, quite aware of this prepossession, determined not to risk a general engagement until he should have succeeded in inspiring his men with greater confidence in their own prowess by securing to them some minor successes. With this view he ranged his troops in order of battle, but protected them by strong intrenchments, and gave orders that no one should dare to move from his post, but stand prepared to repel with their matchlocks and arrows, whatever attack the Affghauns might be disposed to make. In the mean time, putting himself at the head of five hundred chosen

men, on whose valour and fidelity he could rely, he skirmished with such parties of the enemy as came out to oppose him, and made some daring attacks with extraordinary success, cutting to pieces a number of their people. At length, harassed in this manner for four or five successive days, and afraid to expose themselves in closer conflict to so determined and circumspect a foe, the Affghauns retired in confusion to Herat, leaving our troops in possession of the field.

It would have been very desirable to have followed up these successes by a vigorous assault upon the Affghaun chiefs of Herat, and to have humbled the arrogant and turbulent Abdallees by a well-timed and effectual blow, but the time was not yet come; tidings of fresh disturbances in Khorasan were received from Mushed; the perverse folly of the weak Shah Tahmaseb, ever jealous of the increasing fame of his victorious General, encouraged the spirit of disaffection which was but too deeply rooted in the tribes of the province; and the districts of the Koords and Toorkomans were once more in rebellion. Nader was forced to quit his prey, and march back to Mushed; nor was it until the period above-mentioned, the commencement of A. H. 1141, that he found leisure to resume his patriotic views, and turn his arms against the invaders and usurpers of his country.

The preparations for this expedition were begun after the No-roz,* and his Highness celebrated the festival of that season by a series of splendid entertainments to the chiefs and officers of his army, at which he took occasion to distribute among them so many dresses of honour, and presents of horses and arms, that every one entitled to the smallest place in his esteem received some proof of his favour and liberality.

It was the end of April before these preparations were completed, and the army then marched to Jam, a town situated on the road from Mushed to Herat. There his Highness reviewed his troops; and assuredly a finer and better appointed army had not been seen in Khorasan since the glorious days of the mighty Abbas. A few ma-

* Festival of the Mahometan new year, kept at the vernal equinox.

mœuvres, of no eventful consequence, took place during our farther progress ; but the enemy did not show themselves in force until we had advanced to Kaffer Kallah, before the walls of which fortress their General, Allah-yar-Khan, drew up his forces in order of battle, and awaited our approach.

Nader, confident in the valour and discipline of his troops, was eager to bring matters to an issue, and force the enemy to fight ; but ever prudent and wary, he resolved to guard against the possible effects of the impetuous attack with which the Affghauns commonly commence an engagement, and which often succeeds in throwing their enemy into fatal confusion. He therefore protected his infantry by powerful batteries of cannon, and parties of zumboorucks* and matchlock men strongly intrenched ; and he sent a body of cavalry, as at the battle of Sunkhan, to commence the engagement. But this time the enemy was not to be baffled so easily. Regardless of our manœuvres, they made a furious attack upon the right of our line, and supported it so well by constant reinforcements, that, although multitudes of their men were mowed down by the showers of cannon and musket balls, the rest found means to force our intrenchments, and break the line of infantry behind them.

It was on such occasions that the genius of Nader was roused into display. He saw that a powerful effort was necessary ; and hastily collecting a body of his gholaums and chosen guards, he put himself at their head, and charged the Affghaun cavalry which had penetrated our line. His well known shout was heard above the din of battle, and appalled the hearts of the enemy, while it dispelled the panic that was beginning to spread among his own troops. Armed with his terrible battle-axe, he spurred furiously against Amaun Oollah, an Affghaun chief of huge stature and great valour, who had led the party and was dealing death around him : a single blow cleft helmet and head, and the axe descending with fearful force, sank deep in the neck of his powerful dun charger ;—both horse and man in a moment lay rolling on the plain. It was

* Camel artillery.

like the stroke of a thunder-bolt, and like that paralyzed all the followers of the slain ; they reined up, wavered, and gave back, pursued by the dreadful battle-axe, which descended to right and left, on the flying wretches, like the sword of the angel of death.

But Nader had unfortunately received a lance thrust in the foot, which soon became extremely painful ; his troops too, were much exhausted, so that though the enemy fled towards the fort in no small confusion, it was not deemed prudent to pursue them : so we took up our quarters on the field of battle, and lay on our arms for the night.

Undismayed by the result of this severe action, the Affghauns determined to try the fate of another battle, and were found in the morning, drawn out in line ready to assail us. Our General was nothing loth to meet them, and an engagement ensued, which terminated in the complete defeat of the Affghauns, and the possession of Kaffer Kallah, which fell into our hands with all the stores and artillery of the vanquished. From henceforth the progress of the army to Herat, though gallantly disputed by the enemy, was signalized by a succession of victories on our part, and defeat and treacherous negotiations on theirs. At length after a bloody battle between Shekeewan and Herat, Allar-yar-Khan the ruler of that city and principal chief of the Affghauns, submitted to the conqueror, who granted him the most liberal terms. The Khan himself was continued in his government, giving hostages for his fidelity ; and many of the Affghauns were received into the service of his Highness. They agreed to this the more readily, because they were given to understand one of the first expeditions to be engaged in, was likely to be against their hereditary enemies the Ghiljees, at that time in possession of Ispahan. The whole of this expedition and conquest was completed in less than two months, and the army returned to Mushed, towards the end of June.

While the glory of his Highness was thus ripening in Khorasan, and the whole of that extensive province was gradually subjected to the royal authority, Sultaun Ashruff, the successor of Sultaun Meer Mahmood Ghiljee, who held his court at Ispahan, had partly by force of arms,

partly by negotiation and treachery, obtained possession of Yezd and Kermaun, and extended his sway over the whole south of Persia: but by some extraordinary infatuation, he neglected, or overlooked the storm which was brewing in the north of Khorasan: according to the saying of the sage, that "God blinds the eyes of those who are destined to fall into the pit; and, when the hour of fate has come, the prey runs of itself into the snare of the hunter."

But when he learned that Nader had proceeded towards Herat against the Abdallees, an expedition so arduous that he hoped the wonted good fortune of his Highness might desert him, he conceived that while the northern and western parts of Khorasan were thus left unguarded, a favourable opportunity was offered for invading the province, and for establishing in it a footing that might in time be improved into entire possession.

With this view, he mustered the flower of his troops, summoned around him those left in garrison in the different cities of his empire, and commenced his march towards Khorasan. Some idea may be formed of the exhausted state to which the once mighty capital of Persia had been reduced by massacres and misery, when it is known that a garrison of two hundred Affghaun soldiers was considered sufficient to keep the place in awe, and retain possession of it while the Sultaun was absent in search of new conquests. At Casveen, Tehran, Koom, and other important places, which had not been reduced so low, he took the precaution of turning out of their dwellings, and expelling by force beyond the walls, all the male inhabitants fit to carry arms, in order that the small garrisons appointed for these towns might be sufficient to retain them and keep the remaining people in check.

It was the intention of Nader to give his troops some repose after their severe duty against the Abdallees; but information having reached him of the approach of Ashruff towards the frontiers, he issued orders for assembling the army at Subzawar, about the beginning of the Mohur-rum,* and early in September his Highness, accompanied

* The period of mourning, among the followers of Allee, for the murder of his sons Hussun and Hoossain.

by his Majesty the Shah, took the field with an army which in point of numbers and completeness of equipment, surpassed any that had been seen in Khorasan. Never had his Highness entertained so large, so select, or so devoted a body of gholaums; never had his guards been so numerous and well-appointed; never had he mustered together so many and such numerous bodies of well-armed and well-mounted cavalry. The number of fighting men amounted in all to about twenty-eight thousand: of these an unusually large number were provided with fire-arms, and the train of artillery was large and well-furnished. Their late victories over the Abdallees had inspired the troops with confidence in their own prowess; their spirits were high, and they burned to be led against the enemy.

Before arrangements for marching were fully completed, our movements were quickened by intelligence that Sul-taun Ashruff had reached and invested the city of Sem-naun. This being a place of importance, as commanding one of the chief passes into Khorasan, his Highness despatched a courier to the governor, with assurances of speedy support, and commands to hold out to the last, while he lost not an hour himself in moving forward with his army by forced marches, accompanied by the Shah.

On the night before the camp broke up, I was posted on a tuppeh, or hillock, on the right, which commanded a view of the whole extended encampment; and being kept awake as well by impatience as by duty, I enjoyed a full view of this great army getting into motion. Leaning over the wall of a mouldering bastion, the remains of a fort which had once crowned the hillock, I fell into a soothing train of reflection, from which I did not seek to rouse myself. The moon shining with more than half her orb, rode high in heaven; and of the few stars which her lustre permitted to appear, that called the eagle,* which I have ever believed to sway my destiny, sparkled with scarcely diminished radiance. "Blessed star!" exclaimed I mentally, as I gazed on the brilliant point of heavenly fire, "mayest thou ever shine thus pure and bright, and shed

* Altair, from the Arabic Ul-Taer, or "the bird."

thy benign influence on the fortunes of Ismael! May the lustre of thy rays, and the blessed calm which they pour at this moment on his soul, be prophetic of the tenor of his future life!"

Beneath me, on the plain, lay scattered the tents of the army, white, and glittering in the moonshine. Many a dusky mass might be discerned among them, which imagination might shape into bodies of men and horses still in the attitudes of profound repose. The only sounds that arose on the still, calm air, were from the tinkling of the mule and camel bells, the neigh of a horse, or the faint clash of arms from a sentry, as he walked up and down at his post, or when one of the horses, kept ready harnessed for use, shook his bridle chains, or the mace or scymetar that hung at his saddle-bow, as he pawed and stamped with impatience.

Presently the first dubious tinge of dawn stole over the East, and the quick rattle of a drum came rolling on the stillness of morning. It was answered from many quarters, and in less than five minutes after, a murmur might be heard, which increased like the buzz of a swarming hive of bees, and an obscure movement could be detected in the plain. The embers of the fires which had been suffered to die out, were now shook into life, and threw a red and flickering glare on the objects around. The tents which dotted the plain began one by one to fall and disappear; and as the pale and orange light arose in the sky, the glimmer of arms, the flash of helmets, of swords, and lance-points, broke from the dusky masses that formed on the ground where they stood. In a little time, I could distinguish the different corps forming into their several divisions, while the camp-followers and baggage-cattle drew off by degrees, and formed into masses distinct from the fighting men. It was a splendid sight. The morning was brilliant, and a heavy dew had lent a freshness to the early dawn, which the fierce heat of the season denied to the later hours of day. The Shah soon issued forth from the extensive royal enclosure of crimson serpurdehs, preceded by multitudes of Shatirs,* and Furoshes, and sur-

* Running footmen.

rounded by a splendid attendance of officers and gholams, all glittering in magnificent dresses, and mounted on beautiful horses. The appearance of his Highness' suite was less gorgeous; there was no exhibition of finery either on his own dress or on that of his attendants; but the purpose-like, thoroughly well-armed and mounted band that mustered around him, were composed of men whose weather-beaten aspect betokened hard service, as their steady and composed expression proclaimed unshaken resolution and devotion to their chief.

As a mark of respect to the royal presence, the guards of his Highness did not appear in immediate attendance upon his person, but marched as a distinct corps, of which the exact discipline and excellent equipment excited the admiration of the whole camp.

By adhering strictly to the rule of enlisting serviceable men and horses alone, and by observing an equally rigid attention to the regular payment of these, the several corps of cavalry had been materially improved; and some were composed of men and officers to be implicitly depended upon. A spirit of emulation had thus been excited among the chiefs who brought bodies of their own followers into the field, and they followed the example of their leader in retaining in their service such men alone as were likely to prove stout and trust-worthy soldiers. A similar principle had guided the General and his officers in classing the various corps of infantry; and several picked bodies of matchlock men and archers had been trained with care to the practice of his Highness' peculiar tactics, until their activity and steadiness were equalled by their skill. An infinite deal of pains and exertion had been used in completing the stores and equipment of the artillery, large as well as small, and a numerous body of well-trained Topechees* had been regularly organized and drilled. Even the less regular part of the army had imbibed a spirit of intrepidity and order from the bearing of their companions, which placed them much above the level of common Persian soldiers under other leaders. Such was the character of the army with which the hitherto

* Artillerymen.

successful and victorious Nader marched from Subzawar to meet the usurper Ashruff, and drive his cruel, marauding Affghauns from the fair plains of Irak : and it was with a glow of no common enthusiasm that I beheld them file off, corps by corps, from their encamping-ground, and occupy, in long extended columns, the road which leads to Muzeenaun. The numerous banners gleamed above them in the morning light, and the first beams of the rising sun sparkled on the points of their lances, and glanced from their helmets and mail like the moon-beams on the waters of a dark sea. When the last corps had left the ground, and the baggage, under protection of the rear-guard, had got into motion, the outposts were all withdrawn, and giving up my charge, I galloped on to the station I loved best, near the person of the General.

A march of eight days brought the army to the neighbourhood of Bostam, near which some scouting-parties and skirmishers of the Affghauns were observed, and a few prisoners were made. From these we learned that Seyed Allee Khan, a general high in the confidence of Ashruff, had been despatched with a large body of troops and artillery, to check his Highness' approach towards Semnaun, but that on receiving accounts of the force of the army of Khorasan, he had retired towards Damghaun, to await the farther orders of his master. "The fox retreats and doubles to deceive the hunter; the tiger is most dangerous when he crouches," observed Nader, when he heard this report. "Let the sentries be doubled; let the main-guards sleep on their arms; let every chief and officer in command be on the alert to-night, and visit his line of sentries every hour; and let a Mim-bashee,* with a sufficient guard, patrol round the camp the night."

The result proved the penetration of his excellency;—at two hours after midnight, the fire of the sentries, and the shouts of the guard, announced the approach of danger; and the yells of the Affghauns, when they found themselves discovered, as they charged our lines, declared to us its nature. But they found us not unprepared:—from behind each tent and heap of baggage, they were

* A commander of a thousand—equivalent in rank to a colonel.

saluted with a destructive fire; their horses stumbled over the tent-ropes and heaps of lumber placed purposely to impede their onset; and after losing no inconsiderable number of men, and finding no good likely to be effected, they withdrew in confusion, and molested us no more.

Next day, his Highness advanced to Damghaun, in hopes of overtaking Seyed Allee Khan; but that officer, disheartened by his miscarriage, had retreated to join his master, who, seeing that matters had assumed a serious aspect, raised the siege of Semnaun, and marched forward to meet his enemy. It appeared to be the Affghaun's intention to surprise us if he could, and attempt to turn our flank; for some days were consumed in manœuvres and detours, which terminated in his passing to the southward of Damghaun, and occupying a position near the village of Mehmandost, where his Highness, who had watched all these operations with a wary eye, had previously taken up his ground.

The moment had now clearly arrived for deciding the fate of these two great chieftains, and probably of Persia, by a battle which could not fail of being obstinate and bloody in the extreme: and however high might be the hopes and courage of our troops, there were few among us who could view the approach of such a struggle without intense interest, if not anxiety.

During the night which preceded this conflict, the principal chiefs and officers of highest influence, went round each corps as it lay upon its arms on the gravelly slope of a hill, to encourage the soldiers, to recommend silence, attention to discipline and to the orders of their officers, and strenuous preparations of arms and accoutrements for the business of the ensuing day. These exhortations were not without effect, and though the buzz of preparation might rise upon the ear, there was nothing to be detected of noise or idle clamour.

A very different scene was passing in the enemy's camp; tumult and disorder appeared to be triumphant there. The manners and habits of the Affghauns had in truth undergone an important change since the period of their successful invasion of Persia. They were then poor, but brave and adventurous; and, as a means of

conducting to the success of their enterprizes, they submitted to a certain degree of organization and discipline, which had given them a vast superiority over the impatient and luxurious troops of an effeminate monarch. But when both men and officers had become enriched by plunder and by conquest, and when the abject submission of the vanquished had removed all immediate cause of alarm, their vigilance and discipline declined; and the very errors which had been fatal to the conquered, crept into the conduct of the victors. Ashruff himself, although at first he acted the part of a wise and prudent sovereign, appears after his successful negotiation with the court of Constantinople, to have deemed himself beyond the reach of danger, and to have given himself up to the enjoyments of peace. Under such circumstances, it was by no means strange that the moral energy of the Affghaun soldiers should have declined; their courage and love of enterprize indeed remained, but these were no longer regulated by the prudent spirit of order and control which had made them so formidable to inexperienced and undisciplined troops. The number of veterans of which the invading army had originally been composed, was greatly diminished by the casualties of foreign warfare; and though a few recruits had joined them, it was now principally made up of corps raised in different parts of the country, among which no small proportion were Persians loosely attached to the conqueror, and who had been employed for the most part in harassing and plundering the inhabitants of the several districts where they had been stationed. There was but little unanimity to be expected among such men, and even the mutual ties and sympathies of the several Affghaun corps, had been weakened by separation and divided interests: control too had become irksome from disuse, and it was not without a powerful effort on the part of the commanders, that their troops could be brought to submit even imperfectly to the restraint, which the discipline of a camp in presence of an enemy, imperiously demands. As corps after corps of these troops came to their ground, the shouting and the uproar increased, and the sounds of ill-timed mirth and revelry were mingled with those of anger and execration.

Much of the night was passed in this disorder ; but by degrees the noises died away, and were succeeded by a profound stillness, betokening the deepest slumber throughout the host.

There were not wanting suggestions to take advantage of this apparent heedlessness, the truth of which was confirmed by our scouts, and duly reported to the General. But his Highness, with that caution which long experience joined to native sagacity had taught him to observe in his first rencounter with enemies he was a stranger to, declined venturing an issue of so much consequence, upon the uncertainty of a night attack, and ordered his officers to remain quiet, but strictly vigilant, till morning.

CHAPTER XIII.

VICTORIES AND HONOURS.

It might be three hours after midnight, and the darkness was profound, when returning from my tour of duty, I met Caleb Allee Beg, who had been similarly employed. "What news?" said he, after we had recognized each other: "what have you heard or seen?"—"Nothing," replied I; "the stillness in yonder camp appears to be that of perfect repose: who could believe that the dawn must witness the furious charge of that sleeping host upon us, whom they at present appear to heed so little. They surely mean to attack us?" "Depend upon that," said Caleb Allee; "and slumbering as they seem to be, they must be greatly changed from those Affghauns whom I once knew, if, negligent and unwary as you now believe them, we should not experience from them a warm, and probably an unexpected reception. The Affghauns are no despicable foe, as those who live to see to-morrow's eve shall confess."

I was struck with the grave tone of his voice as he uttered these words. "What ails you, my good friend?" said I; "are you ill? You were not wont to be thus cast down upon the eve of a battle. What are these Aff-

ghauns after all? We shall beat them as we have done their brethren of Herat! The star of Nader's fortune is not dimmed, nor is his arm weakened; see what a noble army obeys his voice!—depend upon it, the faces of his enemies shall be blackened with confusion, and those of his friends brightened by victory, ere the sun which is now about to rise, shall set again." "I doubt it not, my young friend; the fortune of Nader is exalted, and his arm will triumph. I am not ill; neither is it doubt or fear for the event of this day's conflict that weighs upon my spirits: but the man who sees his last day about to dawn, has cause for grave reflection, although he may not fear to meet his end. Whatever be the general result of this day's battle, it will be fatal to me."—"What is it you mean, Khan!" said I, astonished at a strain which I had never heard from him before; "the fate of every man, I know, is written on his forehead by the finger of the Almighty; but who can read it? What magic mirror have you used to reflect these unseen and mysterious characters in a language intelligible to mortal sense? Death is the portion of every soldier, and the cup may be held to my lips or to yours, but let us not taste the draught before our fate commands it."—"My friend, the cup is already at my lips: the mysterious words have been interpreted by a tongue that leads not astray. You know I am no coward, no superstitious Meollah to be startled by shadows; but this very night, not three hours ago, a spectre crossed my path, and gazed on me with a mild and melancholy aspect. I cannot describe its form, nor were its words sensible to mortal ears, but, as it faded into darkness, this warning was impressed upon my soul: 'Child of clay! prepare to return to the dust from whence thou camest: to-morrow thy soul is required for judgment!'"

The solemnity with which he made this extraordinary communication, failed not to impress me with a corresponding awe: nevertheless, I endeavoured to convince him that he had been misled by some phantom of the imagination. His only answer was a gentle shake of the head; and the melancholy smile which played for a moment over his features, illuminated as they were by the gleam

of a dying watch-fire, convinced me that the warning had sunk too deeply in his mind to be charmed away at such a moment by any argument of mine. I told him that I trusted ere close of day to laugh with him at his idle apprehension, and that we should then determine whether his spectre belonged to the class of Gouls, Affreets, or Gins. "Well, well," replied he, "if I survive this day, I give you leave to laugh at me, and call me Goul-seer as much as you please : meantime let not the thought of death make you or me exert ourselves the less ; let us remember what we owe our master, and think that the soldier who sleeps the sleep of death on the field of battle, shall wake in the glorious realms of Paradise." We parted, and I returned to my post filled with reflections on the wonderful power of a superstition, to which, though my reason refused its assent, I could not be altogether insensible ; nor was the awe which I felt, diminished by the hour or the circumstances under which we all were placed. In such musings all desire for sleep fled, and I employed myself till dawn in preparing for the duties to which its appearance would summon me.

I was roused at length by the short beat of a drum, which, echoing from one quarter of the camp to another, speedily put the whole in motion. Nader, pursuing the system he had hitherto successfully practised against his Affghaun foes, formed the whole of his army in one compact body, placing the cavalry on either wing in readiness to take advantage of any impression that might be made by the fire of his artillery. The cannon were placed in front, concealed in part by bodies of matchlock men ; the main body of the army was similarly protected, and intrenchments were thrown up at every vulnerable point. Strict orders were given that no one should presume to move from his post, but that the impetuous charge expected according to custom from the Affghauns, should be received where they stood, and checked by a steady fire from artillery and musketry, until his Highness should see fit to order an advance.

The earliest peep of dawn found the army already in this array. As I was certain that the weight of the battle would fall upon the General's guards, among whom I still

retained my command, I solicited and obtained permission to remain with them. We were stationed on the right, from whence we overlooked a gradually sloping plain, at the foot of which ran the bed of the small stream that irrigates the cultivation of Mehmandost, but now nearly dry. On the corresponding slope of the other side lay the Affghaun camp. The sounds which issued from our troops, and which we neither sought to suppress or disguise, roused the Affghauns from sleep :—at least it was not until our arrangements were far advanced, that faint murmurs arising from their host announced that they were in motion. As the morning light increased, we could discern the opposite plain, dark with clustering and moving crowds, which by degrees arranged themselves into separate bodies, and these at length formed into three dense masses of nearly equal magnitude.—It was an interest of no common kind that fixed our earnest gaze upon these dark and threatening columns. The practised eyes of our officers in a moment saw that they exceeded our army in numbers ; but, whether they were intimidated by the good countenance we displayed, or undecided in their plans, they manifested no disposition to commence hostilities. One or two bodies of cavalry darting from their respective masses, made a show of attacking our flank ; but the discharge of a few cannon, and a partial change in the position of a corps, served to convince them that we were prepared, and they withdrew. After a while spent in these manœuvres, the enemy seemed to have made up their minds to come to the point, and resolved, as we showed no disposition to move, to attack us in our position. A temporary suspension of all movements took place ; the chiefs assembled in council, and we could distinguish them mustering round the white charger of the Sultaun himself, who, surrounded by a numerous assemblage of officers and gholaums, formed a conspicuous object in the field. These chiefs were soon to be seen galloping in all quarters to their posts ; the murmur of a great shout rose from the throng, and the whole Affghaun army moved rapidly forward in three divisions.

It was a gallant and spirit-stirring sight to see them bearing down upon us, more than thirty thousand strong,

all admirably armed and equipped. Hundreds of the small flags of companies, so much in use among the Affghauns, waved over their heads ; and the points of their spears, and their drawn swords, gleamed with a flickering light above the dark and compact masses. Two of these bodies were entirely composed of cavalry, while that which occupied the centre consisted both of cavalry and infantry, accompanied by the greater part of their artillery. They moved on gently and in good order to the brink of the river's bed below them : it was an object with their leaders, no doubt, to pass this obstacle without the confusion which might attend a more rapid course. But scarcely had they formed upon the nearer bank, than uttering a fearful yell, the greater part of their cavalry dashed forward at full speed to the charge.

The space between the water-course and our position might be something less than half a mile, but we were quite prepared for this onset ; the word was rapidly passed along to keep steady till the signal should be given, and then to pour upon the advancing enemy the full discharge of our matchlocks and arrows. On they came ; the thunder of their innumerable hoofs increasing every moment till it shook the very earth ; their spears in rest and their naked scymetars gleaming over their heads, filling the air with their war-cries. It was a moment of breathless suspense ; not a sound was to be heard throughout our host until the foremost of the Affghauns had reached within eighty yards. Human nature could have endured no longer, when the report of three cannon parting in quick succession rose above the uproar. Instantly they were answered by a volley from forty or fifty other pieces, and by the quick dropping fire of muskets, which soon increased to a continued roar. The whole line was enveloped in smoke, which for a few moments hid the enemy from our view ; but when the light breeze of morning wafted it in part away, a striking change was seen in their condition. From the close order of the enemy, who had charged in a dense body, every shot we fired must have taken effect, and the front ranks were therefore almost totally destroyed : the plain was now strewed with men and horses, and those behind, who were spurring up at full

speed, increased the confusion by stumbling over the bodies of their fallen friends. The deadly fire of matchlocks and of arrows still continued ; and ever and anon the cannon scattered havoc among the amazed Affghauns, who, confounded at a resistance so determined, wavered, drew up, and then turned and fled beyond reach of our shot.

A strong body of cavalry from each wing was immediately despatched to take advantage of their disorder, and for a while the fugitives were slaughtered almost unresistingly ; but as they fell back upon their reserve, and our fire ceased, they recovered somewhat from their panic, and drawing off on either hand, left our horsemen exposed to a heavy fire from the cannon and musketry of their centre division. This checked us in our turn ; but instead of forming and making an orderly retreat, as they should have done, our men, flushed with success, thought only of carrying all before them—of galloping on, and cutting down the topechees of the Affghauns at their guns. This unlucky mistake was observed simultaneously by Nader and the enemy : the latter detached a farther force of horsemen to complete the confusion which their fire was fast effecting among our men, while his Highness pushed forward a strong body of cavalry, including the remainder of his own guards, to support and bring them off ; and moved on himself in good order, with the matchlockmen and infantry, to act as circumstances should determine.

The engagement now became general and furious : what the Affghauns lacked in discipline, they possessed in personal strength and courage. They charged the most compact bodies of our cavalry in parties of ten or twenty, and often broke them with great loss, by dint of determined bravery ; and though their desultory devotion generally proved fatal to them in the end, it was not without a serious expense of lives to ourselves. So bloody was the struggle, that even the portion of his Highness' guards which had accompanied the first detachment in pursuit, thinned by discharges of cannon in front, and furiously assailed on either flank by the heavy battle-axes and long spears of the horsemen, began to fall into confusion and give back. I had hastily collected a small number of men to rally another corps of cavalry, which was

shrinking under its heavy loss, when, casting my eyes towards my own companions, I saw them struggling with a fresh and powerful troop of Candaharees, who were led by some of the Sultaun's gholams. The crisis was urgent in the extreme: calling out to my followers, and shouting aloud the well-known cry of the "Shurtee Nader!"* we charged the new assailants, who, thinking that a fresh reinforcement had come up, were checked in their career.

At this moment, I observed Caleb Allee Beg,^{*} who was actively cheering on his men, hurled with great violence from his horse to the earth. A cannon-shot had struck him on the shoulder, and carried off his arm, with half the muscles of his side. I flew to him as he lay gasping on the ground, when, gazing wildly at me for a moment, he recognized me, and said with a ghastly smile, "Ah, my friend! you will not laugh at me now! But go,—you are required; take my place and do your duty; mine is over!" There was, truly, no time for delay; consigning him to the care of two trusty men, I flew to the front, where the ground was still hotly contested, though the superiority of the enemy became every moment more decided. My presence and my voice, calling on them to remember who they were, exhorting them to fight for Nader, who even now was at hand with assistance, restored their sinking spirits; and by a strenuous effort, we once more gained ground upon our adversaries, and placed them between us and their own cannon. The junction of a party of our comrades, who succeeded in cutting their way through to where we stood, enabled us to support the struggle with better advantage; but by this time I discovered that the body of guards, of which I was now the leader, had been completely separated from the rest of the army in the fluctuations of the fight, and was opposed, unassisted, to a large force of cavalry, with the infantry and artillery still threatening in front. There was nothing for it but to fight while we could; so, shouting out once more to those around me, that Nader was driving them before him on our left, and that we must open ourselves a path to join

* Life-guards of Nader.

him, I called on them to close their ranks, and charge in that direction.

The name of Nader, echoed from hundreds of tongues in reply, startled the enemy, and aided the force of our charge. Their horsemen were borne down and fled before it, and we found ourselves fast closing with the line of artillery and musketeers. But from them we did not meet the reception I expected;—they seemed to have their attention divided. “Charge them also,” cried I; “charge them, in the name of God, and they are ours!” The spirits of my companions were elevated by the success of our first effort, and the effect of this order was electrifying; scarcely was there time for the guns to be fired, when the gunners were cut and trampled down, and their infantry were flying in all directions. At this moment an unlucky shot struck our banner-man, and the colours, as they fell, were seized upon by one among the enemy more bold than the rest; fortunately, I saw the accident, and clapping stirrups to my horse’s side, reached and cut down the Affghaun, whose sacrilegious hand had dared to touch the sacred ensign, catching it in my left-hand, so that it never touched the ground. Burning with enthusiasm, I cleared a path to the right and left with the sweep of my scymetar: “Onward! onward!” cried I; “who will abandon his colours?—who fears to follow his leader?” and gallantly followed by the whole of my remaining band, I plunged into the thickest of the enemy.

But though surprised and confounded, the Affghauns by no means gave way to their first panic. They turned upon us, and hemmed in our greatly diminished troops on all sides, depriving us of the power to charge them, as, with their long sharp swords, they rushed upon our horses, and dealt them ghastly and disabling wounds, while their riders were engaged with other assailants. And now did I suffer a loss which cost me a keener pang than many a graver misfortune in life;—my faithful Boorrauk had been severely wounded during our first successful charge, by a spear which broke in his chest; yet still he bore me gallantly through the fight, and trampled down many a one who attempted to assail his master. But the sword of an Affghaun reached his side at last, and inflicted another

fearful wound. I saw the deed and revenged it dearly ; for, with a blow of my sword, I clove the villain from shoulder to chest ; but my unfortunate horse, staggering forward a pace or two, sank on his knees with a convulsive shudder ; and scarcely had I time to disengage myself, when he fell on his side, and giving me one look with his bright intelligent eye, stretched out his quivering limbs, and breathed his last. Had my dearest friend been murdered at my feet, the pang I felt could not have been more keen, nor my indignation greater than that which I experienced at the loss of this most faithful and invaluable companion of my toils.

The colours were still safe, and, intrenched behind my slaughtered horse, I kept all assailants at bay ; but how long we could have held out against the odds opposed to us, I cannot say, for the unequal struggle was brought to a sudden close. Loud cries were heard on the left ; and even through the infernal din which surrounded us, I could distinguish the loud and terrible voice of Nader shouting out his orders, and encouraging his men. All was now over ; the shout was returned by every one of us that remained alive ; the enemy, assailed in rear, broke, and melted from before us like snow in the April sun ; and we, who but a moment before had been gasping and struggling for our lives, were left undisputed possessors of the ground, now covered with the flying foe.

Too much exhausted to pursue them, we were resting, panting on our arms, when his Highness, accompanied by a strong party of gholaums, rode up to us at speed. Checking his horse, he threw a single keen glance at us, and then gave rapid orders to several of his attendants to go and stop the pursuit, which had already led some of the troops too far. "The place of encampment for this night is yonder, on the ground deserted by the enemy ;—go ! Let the several corps be mustered there ; and let me have immediate returns of our loss in killed and wounded ; leave only Muhabut Allee and half a dozen gholaums with me—I shall find guards enough here, and trusty ones too. What news ?—how fares it, Ismael ? No children's play this—you have found enough to do it seems ?—these fellows have fought like devils as they are.—Come, muster

the men now ; you must be my guard to camp. But how is this ? on foot ?"—" Your Highness sees my horse,"—replied I, pointing to poor Boorrauk. " What ! my old acquaintance ?—your friend of the Desert ? this is in truth a loss ; but we must try to repair it : meantime, some of you give him a horse."—" Your Highness has sustained a greater loss—Caleb Allee Beg."—" Punah-be-khodah !* killed ?" demanded Nader, in a voice of great emotion.—" Struck by a cannon-shot, while bravely leading your Highness' guards ;—he cannot survive, if not already dead."—" Where is he ? let me once more see my old and faithful servant," said Nader, stifling a groan ; and motioned immediately to lead the way. The spot where I had left Caleb Allee was not far in our rear ; for every inch of ground had been hotly contested, and we had advanced but little. We found him attended but by one aged soldier, for many years under his command, who bent over his mangled officer with a look of fixed sorrow, while his tears, mingling with the blood that trickled from a large wound in his head, dropped heavily on the breast of the dying man. A party of Affghauns, who swept this part of the plain after we had quitted it, had cut down the other attendant, and wounded this old man ; but when they observed his white beard, and saw how he was occupied, the blow was not repeated ;—they left him to himself, and, wounded as he was, he had propped up the body of the unfortunate Caleb Allee, supporting his head in his lap, and covering his ghastly wounds with his garments, thus awaited the painful struggle of expiring nature.

The voice of the General, as he called him by his name, seemed to recall the fleeting senses of the dying man ; for a gleam of intelligence lighted up his glazing eye, a faint smile played around his mouth, and he tried to raise his unwounded arm. But the effort was momentary—as if he had but waited to receive his master's leave, the eye once more became dim, the features sank, and the spirit parted, to seek the reward of a good and faithful servant in the joys of Paradise. Nader bent over the dead, and covered his face for some moments with his hand ; not a

* " God protect us !"

word was spoken, not a sound was heard ; none dared to intrude on the grief of their commander, or break this painful silence. When he rose, his countenance was calm, though grave ; some thought they saw a tear sparkling in his eye : I cannot say if this were true, for I cared not to search into the feelings, or detect the weakness of my master ; but so much I can declare, that neither on this or any other occasion have I witnessed Nader shed a tear. " Let the body be borne to the camp," said he, at last ; " it shall rest in the holy shrine at Mushed ! Let this old man be taken care of,—he shall find that Nader Koolee is not the man to abandon a good soldier and a faithful servant when his beard has become white, and his arms have lost their strength. Ismael, you have done your duty : Guards, I am satisfied with your conduct, and you shall have proofs that I am so—follow me to the camp."

We rode over a plain strewn with the bodies of men and horses. In the place where the guards had fought, many of our comrades swelled the multitude of slain ; but for one of our men there lay at least five Affghans on the field ; and an emotion of pride rose within me, as Nader observed that no where were they heaped more thickly than where we had fought. By this time the enemy, who had fled at first in great confusion, had collected the remnant of his scattered bands, and was retreating in better order on the road to Tehran. Our men were fast returning from pursuit, and joining their respective corps, in order to march to the place of encampment. The Shah, it is said, expressed much discontent at the conduct of his General, in so readily abandoning pursuit of a flying foe, and not a few officers joined in this opinion. But Nader knew his troops : the advantage gained was to be attributed in a degree to that discipline and spirit of subordination which he had been at so much pains to instill ; and he neither wished to risk any relaxation of habits so beneficial, nor the chance of a check, in pursuit of a brave and still formidable enemy, which might deprive him of the fruits of his hard-earned victory. Such were the reasons given to the Shah for his conduct, and no doubt they were the true ones. At all events, if there were others, none ventured to hint at them.

Early on the morrow, the army marched to Damghaun, where tidings having been received that Ashruff had called in all his detachments, and was retreating by the pass of Aheyaun, the army halted no longer than was necessary to secure the prisoners, and the baggage abandoned by the enemy—to collect and bestow its wounded men, and prepare for a strenuous pursuit.

Our loss was found to amount to near two thousand men: of the Affghauns, more than eight thousand were counted on the field, and we had taken nearly three thousand prisoners; many others must have perished of their wounds, being unable to keep up with the rapid retreat of their friends, and falling into the hands of the exasperated peasantry.

Before we quitted our ground, Ibrahim Khan rode up to the guards, with whom I still kept my station, and informed me, that it was his brother the General's pleasure to continue me in command of the division I had led at the battle of Mehmandost; and we found, upon due inquiry, that after all casualties and losses sustained in that engagement, this division was reduced to just one half of its original strength.

By the time we reached Semnaun, information was received from the peasantry, that Ashruff, with the greater number of his troops, had reached the plains of Vurameen, which extend towards Tehran, but had left a strong detachment, under command of Urslan Khan, to dispute our passage through the defile of Sirderah, which is one of the principal passes towards Khorasan, and one through which his pursuers would necessarily be forced to march. His Highness would not, therefore, have halted at all at Semnaun, had not a breach unfortunately taken place between the Shah and himself, arising from his Majesty's weak but habitual jealousy. As unanimity was most desirable, if not absolutely indispensable to the success of undertakings so important to the interests of the empire at large, his Highness thought fit to remain the greater part of two days in that city, in order to afford his Majesty time to clear the mirror of his soul from the clouds of displeasure. The temperate and judicious conduct of his Highness, succeeded in producing that effect; the Shah

owned that he had been to blame, and rejoined the army at Semnaun, from whence it immediately marched to the fortified village of Soorkh Kallah. A long and fatiguing march carried us from thence to the plain of Khaur, and within a fursung of the gorge of the Sirderah pass.

Correct intelligence was here obtained of the dispositions which Urslan Khan had made for defending the defile. The slopes and summits of the mountains near its entrance were lined with matchlockmen; batteries were erected in commanding situations; and ambuscades, both of infantry and cavalry, had been posted to take advantage of the confusion which, no doubt, was anticipated from the fire which should be opened upon us as we advanced. But little knew the Affghaun chief with what a master in this description of warfare he had to contend; one, too, who was intimately acquainted with every foot of the ground, and could command every species of intelligence and guidance which the occasion might require.

The pass of Sirderah lies in a very narrow ravine, which winds for two fursungs through a tract of bare rocky hills: sometimes rising precipitously on either side; in other places, retreating into clefts and chasms well fitted for an ambush. A small stream runs in a deep bed at the bottom of this glen, the waters of which are so salt as to cover the ground and rocks in the neighbourhood with a saline powder, resembling hoar frost; and the whole scene is dreary and savage in a remarkable degree. The mountains which command the eastern and western gorges are of considerable elevation, and among these had the artillery of Urslan Khan been planted; but he never suspected that paths little known except to the villagers around, whose goats wander over them in search of food, pervade these mountains in every direction; and that by means of these his positions might easily be turned and surprised.

Selecting about six thousand men of tried courage and activity, his Highness divided them into two parties, and at the dead of night he led one of these himself up the steep and rocky hollows of the mountains to the right; while Tahmaseb Beg, an officer high in his confidence, performed the same duty on the left. Every man, even Nader himself, marched on foot, for no horses could have

made their way where they had to go. Two other detachments were sent with trusty guides, who had directions to lead them by a more extended circuit through certain subordinate ravines among the mountains, to occupy a position about half-way through the defile. The remainder of the cavalry and infantry, with all the artillery, under the command of Ibrahim Khan, were directed to show face to the enemy, as if it were their intention to attack his positions in front, but not to expose themselves to his fire until signals from the heights should give notice that these were in possession of our troops.

The precision with which these complicated movements were executed, afforded the best proof of the state of practical discipline to which Nader had trained his army. At daylight in the morning, Ibrahim Khan advanced toward the gorge of the pass; but when the officers of Urslan, believing them to be the main body of the army, began to direct the fire of their batteries upon them, they were thunderstruck at finding themselves assailed by a shower of balls from the heights just above them; and seeing them crowded with soldiers in the act of rushing down upon them, with every advantage of ground in their favour, they abandoned their batteries, and fled to join their cavalry in the valley. Here again, however, they found themselves out-manceuvred; for the detachments of our troops, sent in advance, received them with a steady and destructive fire, which threw them into irremediable disorder; and then pouring down upon them sword in hand, put many hundreds of them to death. Thus assailed in front and rear, the rout became general: Urslan Khan, with some of his bravest troops, cut his way through and joined his master at Vuraumeen; but the greater number of the rest, along with several officers of name, were either killed or taken prisoners.

When Ashruff learned the fate of this detachment, he immediately broke up his camp and fled towards Ispahan. He would not lose time or ground by passing through the city of Tehran, but despatched a messenger with orders for the governor of that place to join him, with all his troops, on the march. These merciless savages, by way of a parting token, assembled the principal inhabitants,

massacred them in cold blood, and then fled to join their chief. They could not, however, carry off their plunder and effects; and these, with a few of their number, who were unable to accompany the rest, fell a sacrifice to the rage of the inhabitants.

Anticipating the probability of some violence of this sort, his Highness, accompanied by the Shah, pushed forward with all possible expedition to Tehran; where, though they arrived too late to prevent the massacre, their presence tended greatly to restore confidence and tranquillity both to the harassed city and the country around it. A multiplicity of business connected with the northern and western provinces of the empire, claimed attention in this place; and as his Highness observed that the presence of the Shah in camp, had a strong tendency to promote discontents and disorder among the troops, he took occasion to persuade his Majesty to remain at Tehran for the purpose of regulating the affairs of state, while he should pursue the enemy, and use all possible exertions to drive him from the capital and the country. In this arrangement, the Shah, suffering his royal mind to be convinced by the unanswerable arguments of his Highness, was graciously pleased to acquiesce; and attended by a guard of five or six thousand men, he continued to exercise the functions of royalty at Tehran.

The detachment of so considerable a body of troops did not weaken the real strength of the army; for, after the two decisive victories of Mehmandost and Sirderah, there was no want of recruits; on the contrary, the only difficulty was to make choice among those who offered, and select such only as promised to prove active and valiant soldiers. Before quitting Tehran, his Highness held a formal review of his troops, at which he took occasion to express his approbation of their conduct in general, and particularly in the late decisive engagement. He informed the army that the Shah, at his solicitation, had granted to every man and officer a gratuity of one month's pay; and to every individual who had distinguished himself above others, he added presents corresponding with his rank and merits. When he reached the place where the division of his guards, still under my command, were sta-

tioned, he made a pause, and addressed me with a loud voice, "Ismael Beg, stand forth! with you I have a longer account to settle; and it is fit the chiefs and khans around me be witnesses to the manner in which I acquit myself of such an obligation. Your exertions at the battle of Mehmandost have not been overlooked; the chance of war imposed upon you an arduous duty, and you discharged it like a brave soldier. Had the division to which you belonged given way before the odds they were assailed by, the event of the day might have been very different, for on you did the fury of the enemy fall. Your individual courage and conduct supported the spirit of the men, and twice saved them when almost overwhelmed by superior numbers: and the sacred banner of your corps,—the banner of Nader's guards,—when in the utmost danger from the overpowering force of the foe, was preserved by the effort of your single hand, and borne, at the peril of your life, where it always should be seen, into the heart of the enemy's ranks. For these good services, the Shah—(may Allah protect his sacred head!)—has been pleased to cast on you the eye of favour, and appoints you a Mimbashee in his service, with the rank of Khan. And, as I think you will be pleased to lead the brave men with whom you have hitherto served, I give you the command of a thousand of these my guards. Advance, Khan, and receive the khelut of your office."

Prepared as I was to receive some mark of favour from his Highness, this extraordinary and public acknowledgment of my services utterly astonished and confounded me. In truth, I had not formed so high an estimate either of my efforts, or the importance of their success; I only knew that I had done my best to perform my duty. Confused and embarrassed, I dismounted and approached the General, and pressing his stirrup to my forehead, stammered out some incoherent words expressive of my gratitude and devotion. Nader turned to his brother with a smile: "If this lad fought no better than he speaks," said he, "how much might he be worth?"—"May the favour of your Highness increase!" replied I, recovering my composure on remarking the General's good humour; "let your slave be judged by the rules of his trade: the Mooje-

tehed* himself could not be justly blamed should he fail in attempting to wield the sword or the spear: nor is the tongue always readiest when the heart is fullest. Should your Highness' service require the use of the pen rather than that of the sword, your slave will go to the Medresah, and learn the arts of logic and fine writing."—"Barik-illah! well answered: we can find Moollahs enough, however, without spoiling soldiers. But I am still in thy debt; thou hast lost thy horse in my service. I cannot restore thy old companion of the Desert; but here is a steed of no mean breed or value, take him, and love him, if thou canst, as well as Boorrauk, and let him bear thee to gallant deeds, as gallantly as he did."—"May your servant long rejoice in the shadow of your greatness! he shall be freely risked as ever Boorrauk was, did his value surpass that of the white mule of Allee, or the horse of the Prophet himself: the gratitude of your slave is unbounded as your beneficence!"

The attendants brought forward a noble charger of the true Desert breed, mingled with the noble blood of Neced,† whose clean and powerful limbs, well-marked muscles, shining coat and bright glancing eye, proclaimed his spirit and his vigour. He was fitted with a superb set of silver-mounted harness, and the velvet-covered holsters were filled with a pair of handsome pistols, the work of some artist of Frangestan. I gazed on the splendid present with delight, yet a pang of distress thrilled to my heart as I remembered the price it had cost me. The cloud that passed over my brow was caught by the eagle eye of Nader: "See," said he, "the silly boy is still thinking of his wild Tekeh steed, or his wild Toorkoman life. Well! the time has been when I too would have looked grave at the loss of a favourite horse. What, man! it is the fate of war, and cannot be helped. Mount and away! take charge of your command, and let me see you this evening at the Durkhaneh!"—I obeyed, and with a low obeisance withdrew to my post.

* High priest.

† A district of Arabia, where the finest Arab horses are bred.

CHAPTER XIV.

RECOVERY OF THE CAPITAL.

NEXT morning the army commenced its march for Ispahan ; and as the Shah had expressed extreme anxiety for the deliverance of his capital from the hands of the blood-thirsty savages who possessed it, his Highness made all possible despatch, consistent with due precautions, to reach that place and meet the enemy. But delays, inseparable from the arrangement of much business, and the march of so large an army, accompanied with its artillery and stores, occupied so many days, that Ashruff and his Affghauns, who consulted nothing but their own safety, had reached Ispahan long before the troops of his Highness arrived in its vicinity. Whether the usurper now felt that the star of his fortunes was declining, and came to the resolution of preparing for the evil day by accumulating as much property as he could ; or whether he acted merely from a wanton spirit of malice, and in revenge for the reverses he had met with, it is not easy to determine ; but the moment he arrived in the capital, he sent his soldiers into all the bazaars, and plundered these and the houses of private persons, driving away the owners, and massacring all they met with, to the amount of many thousands : among these were a number of men remarkable for piety or learning, who, tempted by the comparative security which had been enjoyed in the early part of Ashruff's reign, had returned to the capital, or flocked to it from other places.

Having executed this diabolical atrocity, he collected the greater part of his troops fit for service, and deposited all his plunder along with the women and children, in the strong fort which had been built by the Affghauns at Ispahan. In this he left a garrison sufficient to defend it against all sudden assaults ; and resolving to make another desperate struggle for his existence and his crown, he marched out to the neighbourhood of Moortchacoor, a village on the road from Ispahan, to await the arrival of his enemy.

Sensible how much depended on the stand he should be able to make before Ispahan, the Affghaun monarch omitted no means of strengthening his hands on every quarter ;

nor could he have assembled a force sufficient to meet the victorious troops of Khorasan, had he not succeeded in obtaining assistance from the Turks at Hamadan, and in enlisting a number of Persians, discontented traitors, who, in hopes of sharing in the plunder of their country's capital, were content to join with a rebel usurper who was destroying her very existence.

It was on the 12th of November that the advanced guard of his Highness approached the outposts of the Affghaun army. A troop of Koords on that day fell in with, and attacked a party of Affghauns, of whom they killed a good many, and made prisoners of others, from whom information was obtained of the arrangements and strength of the enemy. Ashruff, now more prudent than formerly, resolved no more to stake the fortune of the day upon a single charge, which bitter experience had taught him might fail ; but, taking a lesson from the more successful tactics of his enemy, he drew up his troops in a single compact body, upon an eminence which rose from the plain with a sharp acclivity in front, and surrounded them with cannon and intrenchments. Thus posted, he determined to await the charge of the troops of Khorasan.

At daylight on the morning of the 13th, his Highness, who had passed the night under arms with his troops, in order of battle—when he observed the strength of the enemy's position, and the steepness of the ground in its front, began the action by attempting to turn their flank and attack them from the side of Ispahan, in hopes by this manœuvre to draw them down into the plain. But Ashruff felt and kept his advantage, so that our brave troops had nothing left to trust to for victory, but God and their valour. The matchlock-men, with the camel and carriage artillery, were now ordered to advance and storm the intrenchments ; and the steadiness with which they charged up to the very guns of their enemies, under a heavy and murderous fire, was a surprising proof of the influence which his Highness had gained over the minds of his soldiers, and of the power of that discipline which he had established. Numbers dropped in their ranks, dashed to pieces by the cannon balls, or pierced with musket shot, as we moved swiftly on ; but there was no wavering in the line, nor was a single shot fired until we had reached with-

in forty or fifty paces of the enemy. At that time the signal was given, and a heavy fire was instantly poured in with the most deliberate aim, and such effect, that the foremost rank of the enemy seemed totally swept away.

The determined coolness of our men, and the terrible effects of this volley, so astonished and disconcerted the Affghauns, that they wavered and began to fly:—the gunners deserted their guns, and the matchlock-men threw down their pieces. The keen eye of Nader saw the favourable moment, and his voice, ordering the charge, was immediately heard from the rear, where he had gone to bring up reinforcements:—that voice was never heard in vain: the troops pushed forward, cut down the few Affghauns who remained by their guns, and put the rest to flight.

But Ashruff, who saw this misfortune, and whose natural courage was augmented by the hazard of his situation, resolved upon a desperate effort to recover the day. His cavalry was yet unbroken, and, despatching the principal part of it to repel that of his Highness, which was now in motion to disperse the flying infantry, he headed a chosen body of two thousand men, whose orders were to seek no other object than the person of Nader Koolee, and to spare no sacrifice to take him dead or alive. The moment was favourable for the execution of such an exploit, and at one time the attempt stood no small chance of success. The whole of the infantry were engaged in routing and pursuing the flying Affghauns, and the greater part of the cavalry had gone to support them, or were hotly engaged with that of the enemy, while his Highness, surrounded only by a few officers and gholaums, had remained a little in the rear, to watch the turns of the battle. It was then that this select band, making a small and unexpected circuit, cut its way through the skirts of a feeble line of infantry, and came thundering down upon his Highness and his party. From the nature of the ground, and the dust of the battle, this movement could not be observed until the moment of its execution, while the commanding position occupied by Ashruff, enabled him to see and seize the exact time for his attempt.

Fortunately some corps of cavalry still remained on

their stations, and among others that which I commanded, which was intended as a reserve. Anxious for the success of our squadrons, which were just closing with those of the enemy, I was following their course with my eyes, when loud shouts, and the thunder of many hoofs on the left, struck upon my ear, and through the clouds of smoke and dust I saw the dim gleaming of a heavy, compact body bearing down upon our flank. Instantly comprehending that it was an attack upon a point where there was no force to repel it,—in the absence of any general officer, I called on the guard to follow me, and sent off for farther assistance. The lightning is not more swift than was our charge, yet we were barely in time. The Affghauns, disregarding the feeble efforts of the few assailants who, hearing their approach, had turned to repel it, had borne right onward, and enveloped the little party of his Highness, who were fighting desperately against unnumbered odds, determined at least to sell their lives as dear as possible. The battle-axe of Nader was streaming with gore, and a heap of dead and wounded at his feet, declared how well he had wielded it; nor had the swords of his attendants been idle, for all of them bore marks of their resolution to defend or die with their chief. But the struggle was too unequal; several of his few friends had already fallen, and all would soon have been over, when the shouts of our advancing party rang in the ears of the Affghauns, and the unexpected impetuosity of our charge penetrated in a moment through the crowd, even to the centre of the bloody ring where Nader and his followers stood at bay. This unlooked-for succour staggered the enemy, who began to fall thickly under our blows: not that they yet abandoned their object; on the contrary, recovering from their surprise, they rallied and attacked us with the most determined fury; nor was it until large reinforcements of cavalry came up, and a party of matchlock-men, who formed in their rear, began to gall them severely with their shot, that they showed any disposition to retreat. But it was then too late; the route of their friends was now general, and they were separated from the fugitives. The greater number was cut to pieces on the spot; and Ashruff, attended by four or five hundred men, capitally

armed and mounted, with difficulty cut his way through our ranks, and escaped. The battle was over an hour before noon ; and by three o'clock of the same day the bulk of the fugitives reached Ispahan, a distance of thirty miles. Ashruff, with the mangled remains of his chosen party, did not reach the city for several hours after.

When we had time to breathe, and to see what friends were safe, I turned with anxiety to the General, who was covered with blood. "How! Ismael again!" said he: "always the friend in need! Well, I owe you a good turn for this; demand it when you will, you need not fear refusal."—"But your Highness is hurt?"—"No," replied he, with a grim smile, "rebel villains, vermin such as these, were never born to draw the blood of Nader Koollee—fear not for him!" I had not escaped so well. A severe cut on my shoulder, and a shot through the muscles of my thigh, gave me reason to remember the battle of Moortchacoor.

The result of this battle decided the fate of Ashruff. He had now no choice—no safety but in flight. The crown had fallen from his head, the sceptre of empire had mouldered from his grasp. He felt this; and the moment he reached Ispahan he commenced his arrangements for quitting it for ever. But as it was not in the nature of a barbarian like Ashruff, exasperated as he had been by so mortifying a reverse, to abstain from deeds of cruelty while yet in his power to perpetrate them, he resolved to crown his bloody career by an act as atrocious as unnecessary. The unfortunate Shah Hoossain, whose meekness and piety had disarmed the cruelty even of the fierce and sullen Meer Mahmood, when he slew more than thirty of that monarch's children, now fell a victim to the fury of a worse barbarian. Seeking the retreat in which the wretched monarch had lived since his dethronement, the tyrant butchered him and the few remaining male-branches of the royal family in cold blood, and dragged away their daughters and the other females of the royal household along with him as captives. There is every reason to believe that he intended to complete the sum of his crimes by another indiscriminate massacre of the inhabitants of Ispahan, but that he dreaded being surprised by

the victorious army while his soldiers were thus employed. Certain it is, that he omitted no means for securing his retreat, and lost no time in escaping from the vengeance which he believed to be pursuing him. Dreading the molestation and obstruction which the enraged people might be disposed to offer to a beaten and flying foe, he pretended to have gained a great victory over the troops of Khorasan, and ordered rejoicings accordingly ; but the anxious and alarmed faces of their tyrants, as they hurried from the field of disaster, the numbers of the wounded, and the cries and wailings which arose from the women, belied all his assertions ; and the extraordinary bustle of preparation which ensued, quickly led the inhabitants to guess the truth. Night no sooner came on, than, loading their mules and camels with the richest part of the plunder, and placing on them their women and children, the Affghauns silently quitted the city. Of their whole force not more than twelve thousand souls are said to have thus fled from Ispahan : the shattered remains of those conquerors, who, bursting like a torrent over Persia, laid desolate her cities, reduced her fairest provinces to a desert, and overwhelmed the land with a flood of ruin and misery, which ages will hardly serve to repair.

While these scenes were going on, Nader remained quietly encamped on the field he had won. What the reasons of his Highness might be for omitting to follow up his victory and pursue the Affghauns to Ispahan, I am unable to say.—He permitted neither interference nor inquiry in matters where he was sole judge, nor were his officers accustomed to pry into his councils. Doubtless so wise and great a captain would never have foregone so obvious an advantage without especial cause ; and we, content to execute his commands, seldom gave ourselves the unnecessary trouble of examining into their motives.

When the inhabitants of Ispahan discovered that their oppressors had really fled, they issued from the concealments to which terror had driven them ; and gathering fury from the remembrance of the injuries they had sustained, hurried over the place, searching for, and slaughtering without mercy, such Affghauns as were found yet lingering behind, and endeavouring to indemnify

themselves for the losses they had sustained, by seizing all the booty they could lay hold of. The peasants, too, with all sorts of marauders from the neighbourhood, flocked to the city, and joined in the pillage; so that for two days Ispahan was a scene of the most shameless violence and confusion, resembling rather a city stormed and given up to plunder, than one from which an enemy had just been driven. At length the few remaining persons of respectability and consideration without the walls, sent a deputation to his Highness, entreating him to interfere and take measures for terminating such disgraceful outrages; and it was not until this solicitation arrived, that his Highness sent a detachment of two thousand Koords and Affshars, commanded by Allee Koolee Khan Ahmedloo, with orders to disperse the rioters and restore tranquillity, while he himself moved more leisurely towards the city.

On the 19th day of November, six days after the battle of Moortchacoor, Nader, accompanied by his principal officers, his gholaums, guards, and part of his army, entered the capital. There were few among us who could behold without emotion this great and ancient city, denominated "half the world" by its proud inhabitants,—the seat of royalty,—the favoured abode of the great Abbas, and all the mighty monarchs of the Suffavean line. When we remembered how long it had groaned under the yoke of a barbarous usurper; how much of cruelty and misery had been inflicted upon its inhabitants; how much of sacred and of royal blood had been spilled within its walls; and when we saw ourselves the fortunate instruments, under Providence, of banishing its tyrants, and restoring the vessels of peace and security to its diminished population, we might surely be forgiven if our hearts swelled with pride and exultation. Sick and wounded as I was, I never shall forget the delight with which I gazed upon its domes and minarets as they slowly rose to view; the endless extent of walls, habitations, and gardens, that spread over the almost boundless plain in which it stands; and the thickly clustered villages around it, now indeed chiefly ruined, and destitute of inhabitants, by plunder, exactions, and massacres. In passing through the city, I was unable at the time to remark much beyond the inter-

minable length of its noble bazaars, grand and imposing, though empty, and abounding in traces of plunder and violence. The splendid Maidaun Shahee, and glittering cluster of palaces, with their lofty and noble entrance, the Allee Capee gate, were visions of magnificence which had not even visited my dreams; but I could not enjoy their splendour then: the pain of my wounds was severe, and I was glad to retire to my quarters, in the long range of buildings within the Allee Capee gate, which are assigned to officers about the royal person.

After his Highness had been some days settled in the city, and had despatched the most urgent business on his hands, he held a grand review of his army, causing an exact account to be taken of its numbers, and examining with minute attention into the wants and general condition of the soldiers. He exacted a strict account of all plunder taken from the enemy; and having ascertained, and caused to be collected together all the treasure and property which they had left behind, he distributed magnificent presents in money, horses, and goods, to every officer and soldier in his service, besides paying them up all arrears of pay. These measures increased his popularity and influence with the troops, who, thus finding their own comfort and interest identified with the extension of his conquests and his glory, became more zealous in his service.

The condition of my wounds, which threatened serious consequences, prevented me from being at my post at this review; but I exerted myself to be present at the durbar of officers held in the evening. It was a brilliant and an interesting sight. As the deputy and representative of majesty, his Highness caused the magnificent hall of the Chehl-Sittoon* to be prepared for his reception; its glittering pillars were reflected in the clear canal which extended in front; and the numberless mirrors that adorn its walls, its roof, and its ornamental arched niches, multiplied a thousandfold the thronged and gay assembly which filled its spacious area.

Every officer in the army who claimed a right to stand

* The "palace of the forty pillars."

in the presence of his General, felt it a duty to attend, and to add to the splendour of this solemn display, by appearing in his richest apparel, or accoutred in his most brilliant armour; and many there were among them, whose sunken countenances and bandaged limbs gave testimony to the share they had borne in the conflicts which had terminated so successfully and honourably. The few nobles and men in office, of whatever description, who remained in the city, contributed to its effect by the beauty and variety of their more peaceful costumes; and shawls, furs, gold, silver, and jewels, were produced in far greater abundance than could have been looked for in a city that had been so harassed and plundered as Ispahan.

I will not attempt to describe the ceremonial of this splendid court. The gracious demeanour of his Highness shed the sunshine of happiness over every bosom; each individual believed himself to have been especially distinguished by the compliment or encomium addressed to him, and quitted the presence more gratified by this coveted approbation, than by the rich gifts that were bestowed upon him. Few were the exceptions to this general satisfaction; for few were there among the officers of Nader's army deficient in courage or in zeal. Nor was this an occasion on which he thought it fit to exercise his customary severity; a coldness of address, or a pointed sarcasm, were the severest rebukes he bestowed. As the smile of approbation shone with a warmer ray on those who, like myself, bore tokens of hard service, "Yes, gentlemen, and faithful servants," would he say, "I respect the paleness of your countenances, for they wore another hue upon the field of battle; but some there are whose cheeks only burn with the glow of assurance in the Dewan-khaneh, and blush at the sight of an enemy; whose tongues can storm in their anderoons,* but quail into silence at the roar of a conflict. The sight of a brave man is ever grateful to Nader, and right welcome is the zeal which brought you, notwithstanding the smart of your wounds, into his presence this evening. But the zeal of some can lead them to no higher exertion, and

* Private apartments.

cools when duty most requires its energy:—Ismael, my friend, it is not so with thee. The fortune of war placed thy master in jeopardy, and it is but an act of justice to declare before these assembled officers, that he owed his safety principally to thy intrepidity and zeal. Thou wilt not find thyself forgotten; but now retire:—see to thy health; the flush which begins to glow on thy cheek, and glisten in thine eye, betokens danger: thou hast thy leave—farewell!" Blushing as much from confusion as from the fever, which by this time was thrilling through my veins, I bowed profoundly, and left the presence, followed by many a glance of mingled curiosity and envy.

But though his Highness was unwilling to disturb the harmony of this august assembly, or of the splendid fêtes which followed in honour of his signal successes, he speedily resumed the accustomed rigour of his discipline, and commenced in earnest to reform such abuses as had not failed to make their appearance during the bustle of a campaign, and in the multiplicity of business connected with so extensive an achievement as the recovery of the capital of an empire. Not that glaring instances of misconduct were at any period suffered to pass unnoticed;—on the contrary, summary chastisement was in such cases generally inflicted, and instances of this speedy justice were of frequent occurrence. At the battle of Meortchacoor, when the Affghauns, abandoning their camp, began to fly, some Toorkomans of a certain tribe notoriously given to thieving, gave way to their base propensity; and, while their brother soldiers were sacrificing their blood to disperse and defeat the enemy, they commenced a general pillage, selecting for their booty the richest and most valuable articles to be found. They loaded themselves with gold and silver utensils, splendid cloaks, and the finest furs, and were making dispositions to secrete their plunder, when, unfortunately for them, they were observed by certain gholaums, who, enraged at the idea that such wretches should carry off a prize for which others were risking their lives, informed the General of it directly after the battle. The wrath of Nader was kindled; he ordered the culprits before him, and after sternly upbraiding them with their treacherous rapacity,

directed that the booty they had taken should be produced in presence of the army, and returned to the general depot of captured goods, and that they themselves should be beheaded in front of the pile. This sentence was rigidly executed upon some, but the boon of mercy was graciously extended to the rest, who, after being well bastinadoed, had their ears cut off by the hands of the executioners, and were turned out of camp.

When order was restored to the city, a proclamation was issued, enjoining the strictest attention to discipline and regularity of conduct upon the troops, and denouncing the severest punishments upon such as should be found transgressing. Yet though rigid in exacting obedience, there were instances in which his sagacity and knowledge of human nature induced him to yield to circumstances, and pardon or overlook an offence rather than disgust or dishearten his soldiers by an unbending and ill-timed adherence to rules.

After the battle of Moortchacoor, a petty noble, who resided in a village not far from the field, came hurrying to the camp; and craving an audience with the General, complained in bitter terms that certain of the troops had come to his village after the engagement, forcibly entered and plundered his house, and insulted his women in the harem; and he added with much intemperance of abuse, that after receiving such affronts, and having his honour thus sullied, he could no longer submit to live. "I do not think you ought," replied Nader coolly, after having heard him to an end, and immediately gave orders that the man should be strangled. He afterwards explained his reasons for a conduct apparently so cruel and inconsistent:—"Who," said he, "can at all times hold victorious troops under perfect restraint? A few instances of moderate punishment will effect nothing; and were we to act with rigid severity towards every offender, we should break the spirits and cool the zeal which is so indispensable to bear an army to victory. That fellow was a paltry, double-faced villain, who by truckling to whatever power was uppermost, succeeded in keeping possession of his property even under the rule of the Affghauns. The men he accused were among the bravest of my troops: better a

thousand such miserable reptiles should perish, than that the country should lose the services of so many gallant soldiers, when most required. Besides, were I to give ear to every complaint of such a nature during a campaign, my time would be occupied in punishing my soldiers, rather than in leading them to conquer the king's enemies."

But while those who comprehended the full scope of Nader's policy, were more than ever cautious to offend, there were others, who, thoughtless and shallow themselves, presumed upon a blindness or a lenity of which they did not understand the motives, and which they vainly imagined was intended exclusively to favour the brave and the daring. My old comrade, Fouje Allee, was one of those who, unfortunately for himself, laboured under this delusion: he held his own ferocious and heedless courage to be a sufficient excuse for all possible irregularities, in the eyes of Nader. It is true, he had escaped better than he deserved, out of several scrapes into which his debauched and extravagant habits had led him; and he was rash enough even after the proclamation was formally published, to make his way by force into the harem of a distinguished merchant in the bazaar, and to carry off his wife, whom he had accidentally seen, and by whose beauty he had been captivated. A complaint was immediately lodged by the distracted husband, and there was no sort of difficulty in identifying the culprit, who rather gloried in, than concealed the outrage he had committed, boasting that his was not the master to put the impertinent fancies of a paltry cloth and sugar-seller, in competition with the services and pleasure of a brave soldier like himself. "What!" cried Nader, in rising fury, and bending on the culprit a withering frown, "is the rascal blockhead enough to suppose that his willingness to run his head against a wall can entitle him to abuse and insult at his will and pleasure the peaceful subjects of the king? Such an ass does not deserve to live, even had he not audaciously transgressed our published commands, which, as one of our own servants, he should have been the most scrupulous to observe; but we shall make him an example to all such insolent fools in future." The un-

happy man would have remonstrated and entreated; but it was in vain, for Nader, when once decided in his own mind, never listened to argument or solicitation. He was executed that evening, being blown from a mortar in the Maidaun Shahee, in presence of a multitude of the citizens, as well as of many of the troops assembled for the occasion.

In little more than a month after the recovery of the capital, Shah Tahmaseb, who had been informed of the fortunate event by his Highness' couriers, arrived at Ispahan. Nader, attended by his officers, and a part of his guards, advanced to Gez, twelve miles from the city, to welcome and escort the monarch to the once splendid, though now dilapidated seat of his ancestors.

When the General came near, his Majesty, alighting from his horse, advanced towards him with the most gracious air; upon which his Highness immediately threw himself from his charger, and running forward, remonstrated with his Majesty on this excessive condescension to the humblest of his slaves, which he feared might be misinterpreted by the beholders. "Can the Shah show too much honour to the man who has replaced him on his throne, and bound the crown of his ancestors around his head?" said the monarch in a loud voice. "Let all men know that the Shah acknowledges his obligations, and be witnesses to his gratitude." Nader had by this time kneeled humbly down before the Shah, who thus continued: "Let the Khan exalted in dignity and in valour arise—We constitute and appoint him ruler and governor over Khorasan, the wide province which was first delivered from its insolent invaders by his valiant arm;—and we bestow upon him our own—the royal name:—let him henceforth be called Tahmaseb Koolee Khan!" The air was rent with acclamations as this gracious decree was published by the royal officers; and his Highness arose with a profound obeisance, after humbly kissing the hem of the royal robe, while the King stretched forth his hand to receive the salute, and to raise from the posture of humility the hero to whom he was indebted for his safety, and his throne.

The Shah's entrance into Ispahan was marked with all the pomp and splendour that could be lavished on it. The

troops, with their officers, attended in their gayest array, and the people lined the streets and bazaars as the procession passed, and rent the air with shouts of joy, as their well-beloved prince, the son and rightful heir of the good Shah Hoossein, returned to his capital and to his throne. Oxen were sacrificed as he passed, and sweetmeats in abundance were thrown under the feet of the royal charger, as proudly and leisurely he stepped along under direction of the astrologers, to cross the threshold of the gate at the fortunate moment. There was a demur and a dispute, it is true, between these learned men, regarding the exact time of this lucky period; and some affirmed that it was suffered to elapse while they contended about the matter. This may have been the case, for it is certain that the subsequent fate of this weak monarch was none of the most fortunate; but with this at present I have nothing to do.

In spite of all this splendour, and notwithstanding all the attention which was bestowed upon restoring, as much as might be the former appearance of ease and prosperity to the city, the Shah failed not to observe the sad traces of devastation which could not all at once be removed, as well as the comparatively scanty population, the ill-filled shops, the many ruined houses; and he sighed as he passed along, in spite of the enthusiastic welcome of his people, and the flattering auspices under which he now revisited his capital. But when he reached the palace of his ancestors, the magnificent home of his youth, and recollected the melancholy fate of his father and all his family, whose unrevenged blood still cried out for vengeance; when he saw the fresh traces of their murderers, and the marks of their savage rapacity in the bare and dismantled halls of his palaces; his successes and his triumph were forgotten,—his softer feelings overcame him,—he covered his face and wept.

I was not in a condition to be present on this solemn occasion; but I learned from several eye-witnesses that the scene was impressive and affecting beyond description. Nor did the painful interest stop here; the monarch was destined to receive many another pang in the course of this his first visit to the ancient abode of his family. One

circumstance alone occurred to soften the bitterness of tortured feeling, and excite a mournful pleasure in the breast of the agitated king. Of the multitude which once had crowded the courts and chambers of the royal harem, there now remained but a few aged slaves, whom the Affghauns had left to their fate, and who performed the menial duties of keeping it in order. As the king with a full heart moved through the extensive suites of apartments, now stripped of their gorgeous furniture, all bare and desolate, one of these old slaves rushed forward, and threw her arms about his neck in a passionate transport of joy. It was his mother!—who, ever since the conquest of the Affghauns, had contrived to conceal herself from their observation in the disguise of a slave, and had submitted to all the offices of drudgery, and all the hardships attendant on such a situation, in hopes of one day witnessing the fall of her enemies and the restoration of her family to their dignities and honours. She had endured the weight of one misfortune after another: the murder of the family, with many of her own children; separation from her royal lord and the remaining members of his house; and finally, his death, and the abduction of all who yet survived belonging to him. But she knew that her son, her eldest-born, the Prince Tahmaseb, had escaped from the destroyer; and she hoped and faithfully believed that he should one day repay upon his foes the bitter portion they had forced upon his house; and in that hope she had steadily and patiently endured all the scorn and misery of her fate. She now reaped her reward; she had found her son, and saw him once more in possession of the supreme power, and adorned with those symbols of authority which had belonged to his royal father, but which could not, alas! save him from the decree of immutable destiny.

CHAPTER XV.

SEQUEL TO THE YOUNG MERCHANT'S STORY.

THE exertions I had made to discharge some duties of consequence, previous to the review and Durbar of which

I have spoken above, together with the agitation produced by what had occurred on that occasion, had so serious an effect upon my health, that my wounds began to inflame, and the consequence was a fever, which not only confined me to bed, but put my life in great danger. During the intervals of mental wanderings and delirium which it occasioned, my attention was feebly awakened to a degree of comfort about me, greatly exceeding that which I could command, or which falls to the lot of a soldier: the carpets and furniture around me were of a finer fabric than my own, my couch was softer and ampler, and when I called for something to quench my burning thirst, they brought to me the finest-flavoured and most cooling sherbets. More than one domestic, of whose face I had no knowledge, administered to my wants; and a physician with a grave face and huge grey turban, came frequently to inquire regarding my health.

I was too weak to make much inquiry on the subject, although this change had been remarked by me for some time; and the half-expressed queries which, after a while, I did put to the attendants, were replied to in a way to soothe, but not to satisfy my curiosity. As the fever abated, however, and mental energy began to revive with the first dawnings of returning health, I insisted upon being informed from whence these luxuries were derived, and to whom I was indebted for the care and attention with which I found myself treated. The reply was, that a friend, much interested in my welfare, had provided them; that he called very frequently; and during the time when my life was in danger he had been constantly near me, not leaving the house for days and nights together. I was informed that I should soon have a visit from this kind friend, who had only waited till my restored health had made it safe for me to introduce himself in person. I wearied myself with conjectures as to who this well-wisher of mine could be, nor could I enjoy any rest until the hour which was to satisfy my curiosity. At length the bustle of an arrival was heard, the approach of my friend was announced, and, as the door opened, my languid eyes fell upon the features of the young merchant, Meerza Aboo Talib, to whose generous kindness I had

already been so deeply indebted during my first visit to Mushed. A faint exclamation of delight escaped me, and his own mild and gracious countenance was lighted up with a smile of pleasure, as he approached and gave me joy of my convalescence. "You know not, my dear Ismael," said he, "how many painful apprehensions I have had on your account, and how anxiously I have waited for the moment when I might prudently make myself known to my friend. But you must not speak," continued he, observing me about to address him; "you are forbid to talk; and should know too well the danger of agitation, to disobey the orders of the learned Hakeems who attend you."

"Excellent friend! most kind Aboo Talib!" exclaimed I faintly, in spite of his caution—"I shall only say that Providence, in you, has sent me a blessing of which I am unworthy, but which is more welcome than water in the desert to the dying traveller. May Allah preserve you! and render me worthy of your friendship!"

"Hush! my friend, do not agitate yourself thus, or I must quit you at once. If you will but be calm, I shall sit by you awhile, and, in order to allay the curiosity which I see you are tormented with, I will tell you how I discovered you to be in Ispahan; hereafter, I hope we may converse with less restraint.

"When our Affghaun oppressors had fled from the city in consternation, and the disgusting scenes of anarchy and outrage which succeeded their precipitate retreat had been checked by the arrival of your General's troops, the few peaceable and terrified inhabitants who remained in concealment, ventured forth from their hiding-places,—many of them to witness the utter ruin which had overtaken them by the pillage of their property in the bazaar. I was myself among the sufferers, though comparatively in a small degree, for you know that the sources and extent of my wealth are little liable to be affected by the miscarriage of any adventure, or the loss of any portion which I ever choose to risk, and, thanks be to Allah! the repositories of my treasure are too well concealed to be liable to detection, however minute may be the search.

"On the morning after the grand review, I repaired to the Dur-khaneh, in hopes of procuring an audience either with his Highness or some of his principal officers, on some business relating to the recovery of my stolen merchandize, which I had traced, as I believed, to the robbers who carried it off. I had attended there more than once before, but the press of business was so great, that I could not obtain any notice; nor was I more fortunate on this occasion; but while waiting patiently in the anti-chamber, I heard an earnest conversation regarding the signal marks of favour bestowed by his highness the General upon a certain Ismael Khan, an officer of the body-guard.—Ismael Khan!—I was struck with the name, for it was that which was borne by my friend in Mushed; but the bustle of events that have elapsed since we parted, had confounded my memory, and I could not recollect in what capacity you had served the General. I was puzzled also with the *Khan*, and the name is so common that it might be borne by many besides my friend. Yet I remembered his high promise: something stirring in my bosom seemed to tell me that I was not mistaken—that the man who by his address and gallantry had extorted a tribute of admiration from the rigid Nader, was not unlikely to acquire the honourable distinction of nobility. I hastened to inquire who this young hero might be; and the result was a conviction that it was in truth the very Ismael whose frank and generous bearing had won my friendship in Mushed. Need I tell you how powerfully this intelligence excited me? how ardently I longed to meet you, and to renew the pleasant intercourse that subsisted there between us?

"I lost not a moment in discovering your abode; but was informed, on reaching it, that you were confined to bed, and too unwell to see any one. Unwilling to disturb you at such a time, I retired, and repeated my visit the next day, when, finding that you were rather worse than better, I made myself known to old Cossim, who was overjoyed at recognizing me, and who most zealously promoted the arrangements I proposed making for your comfort. Many an anxious day has since gone by while we almost despaired of your life; and many an hour have I watched,

unseen by you, the flushings of your fevered cheek, and shuddered with terror at the heavy moans and wild wandering sentences, which, every now and then, would burst from your parched lips."

"I have been a sad charge to you, my kind friend," said I, unable to contain myself; "but this is not the first time you have suffered vexation on my account, unworthy and luckless as I am, how can I ever requite you for your goodness?"—"By being silent and tranquil, and taking care of yourself," returned he, "and not undoing what has cost us so much anxiety to achieve, by indulging your natural impatience. Believe me, that all the uneasiness I may have suffered will be more than repaid by seeing you restored to health, and fit to resume the high career which doubtless lies before you. It is not now you are to learn the affection I bear you; and I can assure you that such sentiments could never have been excited in my breast, had I not discerned among the weeds of thoughtlessness and dissipation that sprang up in your heart, the blossoms of a noble and energetic mind, pregnant with enthusiasm, with feeling, and with honour. My prognostics have not been false; you have seen the error of your ways; you have re-entered the path of virtue and honour; and having experienced the comfort of such a course, I am persuaded you will never more depart from it."—I was too weak to attempt a reply to these kind sayings of my friendly Aboo Talib, who took his leave soon after, promising to pay me a longer visit on the morrow.

In the course of a few more days, my health was sufficiently re-established to allow of unrestrained conversation, and to enable me to quit my couch; and Aboo Talib insisted upon removing me to his own house, where, he said, my comfort could be better attended to. When able to bear the motion, and strong enough to profit by change of air, he carried me in a tucht-e-rowan* to a delightful garden which he possessed in a village near Ispahan, where, though the season denied us the enjoyment of country pleasures, I experienced a salutary and agreeable change. The wind sighed, indeed, through the leafless branches of the chinars and tall poplars, and the rose-

* A litter borne by mules.

bushes were stripped of their foliage as well as their blossoms, nor did the bulbul court with her sweet melancholy song the withered flowers among which she used to linger in the balmy evenings of spring : yet the symmetrical regularity of the garden pleased the eye, while its saddened hues were in harmony with the chastened enthusiasm of a youthful mind, softened as mine was by ill health and the reflections it occasioned. Within doors the bright glow of a blazing wood-fire tempered the rigour of the chill evenings, and my friend would frequently provide against their dulness by the company of some agreeable friends whom he brought together to meet me.

Several weeks elapsed in these calm enjoyments, but before one had gone by, my friend and I had mutually related all that had occurred to us since the time of our separation. I will not dwell upon the poignant feelings of humiliation and shame with which I acknowledged to this generous friend the lengths I had gone in folly and wickedness, and reproached myself for the thoughtless manner in which I had abused his confiding liberality and despised his often repeated advice. Whenever I came upon the subject, he stopped me short—"Let us hear no more of this, my dear Ismael :—a mist in those days overhung your better judgment, and the very excesses into which you were hurried, have wrought their own cure ; you have seen your errors, and are disgusted by vice ; it has been a cheap outlay for so valuable a result—how, then, can I but rejoice at it ?"

It was a matter of much satisfaction to me, that the influence I possessed in the General's family, enabled me to render material aid to my friend, in the arrangement of his business at court ; and by means of the assistance I procured for him, he succeeded in recovering great part of the valuable goods of which he had been plundered after the flight of the Affghauns from Ispahan. I will now relate the substance of what befel his wife, the beautiful Zoolfah, after she was carried from his house in Ispahan, as has been described in the first part of the young merchant's story ; and I give it as much as possible in his own words.

"On the evening when I was so unluckily induced to leave my house in search of food, my unfortunate wife re-

remained in the most painful anxiety, listening for the slightest sound, until, hearing a noise in the outer apartments, which she believed to be occasioned by my return, in her impatience she imprudently went forth to meet me, and was seen, pursued, and carried off by the wretches who had entered the house in search of very different prey.

"The youth and beauty of Zoolfah, and the rich ornaments she wore, convinced her captors that she must belong to a wealthy family. The prize was too valuable to be trusted within the gripe of Mahmood, so it was resolved to send her off immediately to Komeishah, which was the head-quarters of Nasser Oollah's troops. Accordingly, disregarding her tears and cries, as well as her repeated assertions that she was a married woman, and that her husband would ransom her at any sum they might demand, they muffled her up in a cloak, and placing her behind one of his officers, despatched her to Komeishah, escorted by a party of twelve or fifteen Affghauns.

"The road to that town passes near to Ben Ispahan, a small town, which, by its spirited conduct during the contest with the Affghauns, had afforded a striking contrast to the pusillanimous supineness of the capital. The inhabitants of this little place, which was very imperfectly fortified, arming themselves as best they could, opposed successfully every effort of the enemy to obtain possession of their town. They submitted neither to assessment nor voluntary contribution, and were so far from betraying any symptoms of alarm, that they invariably put to death, without respect of persons, all prisoners who fell into their hands in the sallies and attacks with which they harassed their enemies; and such was the dread entertained by the Affghauns for the brave peasants of Ben Ispahan, that long after the capital had fallen into their power, the conquerors were glad to grant them very favourable and honourable terms of capitulation, which they were too fearful of consequences ever to infringe.

"The dreadful scenes which were passing in the capital, and the apprehension of a like attempt at treachery on the part of Meer Mahmood, had at this time, however, so far excited the suspicion of the Ben Ispahanites, that they kept a very jealous watch within their walls, and sent forth

parties every night to watch against any hostile movement which might be set on foot against them by the Affghauns of the capital. The soldiers who were escorting my wife, on their way to Komeishah, fell in with one of these patroles, and, being irritated at the questions which were put to them, replied sharply and haughtily. A scuffle ensued, and Zoolfah, catching hope from the fray, contrived to tear off some of her muffings, and called for help in the name of God, exclaiming that she was a Persian woman forcibly carried off from her husband. The officer behind whom she was seated, did all in his power to silence her cries; but the brave villagers, on hearing her exclamations of distress, set upon the Affghauns, struck down the officer, beat many of his men from their horses, and carried them, along with my wife, into Ben-Ispahan.

“So soon as Zoolfah had related her story, she met with the greatest possible kindness; and the Ketkhodah promised that no harm should befall her while she remained in his hands, nor should she be delivered over to the Affghauns, in whatever shape or form the demand might be made; but of that which would have been the only efficacious cordial to her sinking spirits—intelligence of her husband—there was no immediate hope; it was more than the life of any stranger was worth to be seen in the streets of the capital, and the inhabitants of Ben Ispahan had experienced too fully the advantages of open dealing in all intercourse with their dangerous enemies, and dreaded too much the consequences which might follow their being detected in making any inquiries in the capital, to venture there during a period of so much jealousy and peril. My wife, while forcibly carried off by villains, had claimed their protection, and she should enjoy it; but not for her, or for any one’s sake, would they depart from the system they had adopted, nor endanger their families and property by entering Ispahan, while suffering under the caprice of its tyrannical usurpers. Accordingly, she was kindly entertained in the Ketkhodah’s family, but remained there a prey to the most cruel anxiety.

“This rencounter with the Affghaun soldiers, and the rescue of a Persian woman whom they were carrying off, became a matter of conversation throughout the little town;

and as Zoolfah, in her communications with the Ketkhodah, had not concealed the name of her family, which she mentioned, in hopes of interesting him to make inquiries after her husband; this also became publicly known. It happened, that these circumstances being alluded to in a shop in the bazaar when there were several strangers present, one of them, turning with surprise to the speaker, begged that he would relate the whole story. The man repeated what he had heard, but referred the stranger for farther particulars to the Ketkhodah himself, in whose family the lady continued to reside.

"The stranger lost no time in applying to the Ketkhodah; and, after civilly requesting to be informed of every thing relating to the lady's story, told him that he himself was one of Cazee Meerza Mootaalib's sons, and that she who was indebted to his hospitable protection, was, consequently, his own sister. That he had been for a long time absent from Ispahan, and was on his return there, to learn how his family had fared during all the revolutions of the capital, when the tidings of the insurrection at Casveen, and the consequent proscriptions and massacres at Ispahan, had reached his ears, and he had taken refuge within the walls of Ben Ispahan, intending to remain there until the storms in that quarter should subside. He now begged the Ketkhodah to inform his sister of his presence, and of his willingness to receive her under his own protection until the fate of her husband should be known; and he offered at the same time to produce undeniable proofs of his identity.

"The Ketkhodah had no objection to make to so reasonable a proposal; perhaps he might not be ill pleased to be relieved from a charge which was not free from inconvenience or responsibility. The man did, in fact, prove to be Meerza Neyaz Allee, second son of Cazee Meerza Mootaalib, who, some years previous to the siege of Ispahan, had gone to study the law at Koom, and who, hearing of his father's death, had resolved to return home, in hopes of receiving a considerable portion of his wealth; when, as he told the Ketkhodah, he had been scared from the city by accounts of the horrors which were committing there.

"In the first interview with Zoolfah he learned enough to comprehend that the bulk of his father's fortune was in my hands, and he resolved to leave no means untried to wrest it from me. As a first and most important step towards this purpose, he resolved to get my wife into his power; for he did not doubt that I would willingly ransom her back upon his own terms, provided he could find means to carry her off beyond the reach of any influence I might possess in Ispahan.

"The affectionate solicitude which he affected for my poor Zoolfah, and the assurances which he gave her, of sparing neither trouble nor risk to ascertain my fate, won upon her so far, that, though she had never liked her brother, she now willingly accepted his protection, and was received by his wife as an inmate of his harem, until some intelligence of me should be obtained.

"The Meerza kept his word, in setting all possible inquiries regarding me on foot; nor did he fail to discover that I had escaped the massacre which had been so general, and that I was at that very time in the greatest despair, making every possible effort to recover my lost wife. But he did not tell her this: on the contrary, he resolved to carry her to Koom, where he should have it in his power to deal with her on better terms for himself; and in order to induce her ready compliance, he framed a story that he had certain information of my having escaped from the slaughter and gone in that direction for the purpose of seeking her. It was at this time also, that by way of opening his negotiation with me and stimulating my hopes, he conveyed to me the intimation of Zoolfah's safety, which was the first thing that raised me from the depths of despondency.

"The bare idea of meeting me made poor Zoolfah impatient to quit Ben Ispahan; and Meerza Neyaz Allee was too desirous to compass his own ends to detain her long. Taking a considerable circuit to avoid the plundering parties of the Affghauns, they left on their right the plain and village of Mootchacoor, and entered the pass of Kohrood a little beyond the village of Soo. They were ascending the steep and intricate path, and calculated upon reaching the village of Kohrood long before the day

should close, when, as they opened out the gorge of a narrow rocky ravine, they were startled by a shrill shout ; and before they had time to look round, fourteen or fifteen savage-looking horsemen suddenly started from behind the huge fragments of rocks that lay scattered on the mountain-side, and rushing down the rugged precipice as if it had been a level plain, couched their spears, and called on them to surrender. The Meerza's party were just then slowly picking their way along a narrow and stony path, which slanted along the face of a steep and craggy slope ; beneath yawned a dark chasm, which in winter formed the bed of a torrent produced by the melting snows. The Meerza's horse, terrified at the sudden uproar, reared upright, and unable to recover itself, fell backward with its master, and they rolled together down the slope, and fell with a heavy crash into the chasm beneath. No one, however, attended to their fate ; each did the best he could to escape, but only one or two of the best-mounted servants succeeded. Some of the mules, kicking off their loads, ran capering here and there among the rocks ; the rest of the party, including my unfortunate wife, half dead with terror, were seized, and found themselves totally helpless at the mercy of this ferocious band.

"No time was lost by their captors in securing the women upon mules, and replacing all the loads that could be recovered ; the rest were abandoned for the time, and each of the party seizing a horse or mule thus loaded, by the bridle, struck their sharp stirrups into their own horses' flanks, and urged them unsparingly up the steep and stony face of the mountain. They continued thus to ascend for two hours unremittingly, sometimes winding along the slope, and occasionally pressing right up the steepest declivities, even when covered with shivered fragments from the precipices above. When they had reached the summit of the mountain, their panting horses were so severely blown, that they were forced to halt and give them breath. They permitted them to pick the scanty herbage that grew among the stones for an hour, and offered some butter-milk and water to the women, who by this time were hardly able to support themselves upon their horses : but they were forced to mount again, and after

a descent of two hours as dangerous and fatiguing as their ascent, they reached a deep and narrow valley, where a fresher verdure was produced by the moisture of a little stream, and where, upon some level spots beneath the rocks, were scattered a few black tents.

"The evening was by this time fast closing in, but the people rushed from their tents at the shouts of their friends, and received them with yells of joy. The women were lifted half dead from their horses, and carried into a tent, where such refreshment as could be produced by its wild inhabitants was plentifully set before them. But they were in no condition to accept these well-meant attentions: terror and despair overwhelmed their souls, and all they wished for was leave to lie down and die in quiet.

"This, however, would by no means have suited the purpose of their captors, who were retainers of Kooch Allee Beg, the chief of a wandering tribe inhabiting the mountains between Kohrood and Goolpaigaun. Like many others of these chiefs, he supported his establishment and retainers by plunder; and infested all the roads around, seizing on passengers and goods, and demanding exorbitant ransoms for the persons of those who unfortunately fell into his power. Ever since the Affghaun invasion, he had continued their bitter and unvanquished foe, and had done them no small damage, by pouring suddenly on parties of their troops while marching unwarily about the neighbouring country. Perhaps his men believed that the Meerza and his train were Affghauns; not that a knowledge to the contrary would have made any particular difference in their favour,—for Affghaun or Persian, Toork or Tadjuck, were treated with perfect equality by Kooch Allee Beg. All of them brought plunder or ransom to his coffers. The capture of two such women as the wife of Meerza Neyaz Allee and Zoolfah, independent of their female attendants, was looked on as a prize of no small consequence; and the men resolved to carry them straight to the castle of their chief. The poor creatures could not taste food, but the wife of the Reish Suffeed* of the encampment prepared a rich cordial for their

* Grey-beard—i. e. Elder, or chief.

use, and presented it with some words of comfort—bade them be of good cheer, for the Khan (might his prosperity increase!) was not a harsh or cruel man, and doubtless would restore them to their friends upon payment of a reasonable ransom. A ray of hope seemed to dart into their minds at this most cheering view of their case; they drank the cordial, and sank to profounder rest than they had ever again expected to enjoy.

“Early next morning the party prepared to proceed. The women, though suffering and fatigued, were forced once more to mount their horses; and quitting the black tents, they descended the valley. After toiling over some rough mountainous ground, thinly sprinkled with stunted oak trees, they wound gradually downward to a valley of larger size, in which stood a large fortified village, surrounded by cultivated ground. Numerous groups of black tents were scattered over the plain beyond it, and their flocks fed in the mountains around.

“It was well on in the afternoon before the party reached the village, having had no refreshment, except a little buttermilk and water, during the whole day. The prisoners were immediately taken to the house of the Khan, which was surrounded with a high wall of mud, with towers at each corner, and which to the miserable captives seemed a hopeless prison. The women were sent into the harem, where they were immediately surrounded by the inferior females of the family, who flocked about them with looks of the utmost curiosity, examining their persons and clothes with an energy that threatened to leave not a shred of them upon their backs. Order, was, however, restored by the arrival of two elder women, who came to desire that the captive ladies should instantly be brought into the presence of their mistress, the Khanum.*

“They were accordingly led into a small apartment, where they found an old woman smoking a pipe; her head was muffled up in shawls, and her dress, though a little fantastic, was not deficient in richness, being a mixture of that which is usually worn by Persian ladies of rank, with

* Khan's wife, the female of Khan.

the garb more peculiar to the women of the tribes. Her countenance, although wrinkled by age, wore an expression of benevolence, and the lustre of her full dark eye was yet unquenched. She received the ladies with kindness, addressing to them a few words intended for consolation: observing that fortune was sometimes propitious when she appeared to be most adverse; that their situation might prove to be more agreeable than they looked for; and she was proceeding to prove how much cause they had to be thankful for having fallen into such good hands, when she was interrupted by a slight cry from the wretched Zoolfah, who, unable to support herself any longer, sank on the ground at the feet of the Khanum.

“For some time previous to her being carried off from Ispahan, my poor wife had enjoyed the hope of becoming a mother. The continued agitation she had suffered since then, had greatly enfeebled her frame, and horror at her capture by the people of Kooch Allee Beg, united with the fatigue of the last two days’ distressing journeys, completed her derangement. Assistance was given to her; she was carried into another apartment, where a miscarriage, accompanied by the most alarming symptoms, terminated her hopes, and almost her life.

“For many weeks she continued in the utmost danger, during all which time she received the most careful attention, and the Khanum herself came frequently to see her. Youth and disease had a fearful struggle; but, happily for me, the first prevailed, and Zoolfah slowly recovered. When, after several months, she was able to leave her room, the Khanum would have her come to her own apartment, and, honouring her with a seat near herself, would seek to hear her story, and always repaid the obligation by some pithy apothegm or moral observation. But whenever my wife touched upon the subject of her liberty or ransom, she would put aside the appeal. ‘Time enough, my child, to talk of that when you are stronger; you could not move at present if you were free to go where you would. Besides, the Khan alone settles these matters—I never meddle with them; and he is absent now—but he will soon return, and you will learn what are his intentions regarding you.’

"The Khan did accordingly return, and with him his two sons, both of whom had been absent on expeditions, from which they brought back both prisoners and booty. Some of these were females, and they were taken into the harem of the Khan, and appropriated to one part or other of the family, for both his sons had their establishments of women within its extensive walls.

"A few days after his arrival, the chief desired to see my wife, of whose recovery he had been informed; and accordingly she was ordered to attend in the Khanum's apartment, where he chose to receive her.

"He was a man well stricken in years, and the expression of his countenance was pleasing, though tintured with something of wildness; his beard, of a silver grey, covered the greater part of his still ruddy and healthful cheeks, and a piercing dark eye, of unsubdued brilliancy, seemed to vouch for the unshaken powers of both body and mind. His turban, formed of several coloured handkerchiefs, was swathed fantastically round his head, falling back over one shoulder; and a grey sheep's-skin cloak was flung carelessly over his plain brown vest.

"The Khanum was seated at a little distance below her lord, and the only male in the apartment besides himself was his youngest son, a man of about five-and-twenty years of age, and of a most unpromising expression of countenance. His face of a dark, sallow hue, was thickly pitted with the small-pox, which had seamed one cheek in a fearful manner, and distorted the eye on that side; his black eye-brows, and thin curly beard, gave an additional gloom to the ferocity peculiar to his features. He was round-shouldered, and square built: and though an excessive habitual stoop detracted from his height, it did not perceptibly diminish the massy bulk of his person.

"My wife, when she entered, was still covered with her veil, and upon observing the young man, whose fierce licentious looks inspired her with an instinctive dread, she drew its folds closer around her, and remained standing near the bottom of the apartment, uncertain how to act. Even the Khanum's order to unveil was disregarded; but the chief, with good-humoured impatience, exclaimed—
'Punah-be-khodah! what nonsense is this? what does

the silly creature fear? Remove thy veil, child; here are none to harm thee. Thou art not now among the Khans or the merchants of Ispahan; you are among the tribes: we are honest, rough mountaineers, girl; you must leave these city airs, and do as we do. Come, come, off with thy veil, thou little fool, or I shall think thou hast no face to show.' There was no resisting longer, and had she been inclined to try so foolish a part, it would not have availed her: two slaves stepped forward to lend their aid, so she at once threw off her veil; and shone forth upon the old man and his son in all her beauty. 'Yah ullah!' cried the old chief, as he motioned her to be seated—'what is this that has come among us!—this is a true virgin of Paradise; Zooleikah and Shireen* were nothing to her! By the head of my father! I must get young again for her sake. What say you, Khanum—think you I may yet prove a fit lover for this fair one? But no, no! I have had my day—so sweet a rose is not for the bosom of a withered old mummy like me; let the young mate with the young; we must see to have her better matched.'

"Thus did the lively old chief jest on. Yet, though there was an import in his words which filled the heart of Zoolfah with fearful forebodings, the terror they conveyed was nothing to that which thrilled through her frame at the fixed and ominous looks of the son, who started with hideous delight as the veil dropped from her countenance, and continued gazing with intent and gloating eyes upon her trembling form. The moment the chief ceased to speak, she seized the opportunity to cast herself before him, and to supplicate in the most earnest terms that he should consent to receive her ransom, and send her back to Ispahan.

"What news are these?†—what does she say?—what does she mean?" said he, turning sharply to his wife, who sat quietly looking on at what was passing: 'have you treated her ill? is she not contented? what

* Potiphar's wife, and the mistress of Kai Khosroo; two heroines celebrated in Persian romance.

† *Che Khuber ust?* literally, "what is the news?" is a common expression of displeased astonishment in Persia, as, "what is all this about?" in English.

more would she have? Explain, in the name of heaven!’ ‘Thy slave would represent to her lord,’ replied the Khanum, ‘that the poor captive before his august presence is foolish, very foolish. She talks of a husband, and wants, forsooth! to get back to him: as if, indeed, there were not many better husbands to be had among our brave Koordish youths. But she will learn wisdom anon: and when your Highness shall again deign to enlighten her steps with the brightness of your countenance, the heart of the unfortunate will expand, and she will comprehend her happiness in having found favour in your Lordship’s eyes.’

“A buzz of applause arose from the female attendants at this speech: ‘Mash-allah! the Khanum is right;—certainly; excellently said;—she is truly fortunate, and she will become wise. God is merciful! she will henceforth understand her duty.’ ‘Yes, yes, no doubt of it, if she will see her folly, and cast it from her,’ observed the Khan, as taking a long whiff of a fresh calleoon, he slowly puffed it out, and nodding his head twice or thrice good-humouredly, he repeated, ‘Yes, yes, daughter: Inshallah! your eyes will be opened to see your good fortune, in falling among those who know how to value you, and be kind to you; and you will soon be happier among us than ever you were in your life. You may retire,—you have leave:—the Khanum will see that you are made comfortable in every respect.’ Another murmur of applause arose from the females. ‘Belli! belli! belli!* how good, how kind, how condescending a master! Yah Allee! he is the shadow of the oppressed, the support of the weak, the shield of the wounded and the prisoner! May God preserve him and increase his prosperity! Come, come, offer your thanks, make your salaam, and retire as he bids you. Come, come away!’ There was no more to be said, so they hurried her off, weeping and striving to make herself heard, in a vain attempt to move the compassion of those who could neither comprehend the nature nor the cause of her grief.

* *Belli*, signifies “yes;” and is colloquially used as an exclamation of gratified surprise.

"A period of several months elapsed after this, during which she had frequent intercourse with the Khanum ; but although she pined for another opportunity of entreating the chief to send and negotiate for her ransom at Ispahan, she was constantly disappointed, for he was almost continually absent upon various expeditions ; and the females whom she would have engaged to solicit an audience for her, laughed at her distress, saying, that better things were intended for her than she thought of for herself : thus the unfortunate Zoolfah had only to shed her tears in secret, and nurse the faint hope of better days, which, in spite of reason itself, would not be extinguished in her breast. Once or twice, as she sat with the Khanum, the chief's youngest son came in, and terrified her with his ominous glances ; and, unhappily, it afterwards appeared that he had seen her but too often, and at times when she was not aware of being observed. Still, however, she enjoyed tranquillity upon the whole ; and, excepting in the particular of being utterly deprived of liberty, her treatment in the house of the Khan was as kind as possible.

"One day she received a message from the Khanum, requiring her presence ; and on repairing to that lady's apartment, she found there not only the old chief, but his two sons. The elder, whom she had not before seen, was a tall, mild, sickly-looking young man, whose composed and pleasing countenance appeared in very favourable contrast with the dark scowl and malevolent expression of his younger brother. To this person she was introduced by the old man in a strain of panegyric, the motive of which could not be mistaken. But her beauty and modesty appeared to be lost upon the youth, who replied to his father in set terms, of which the manner was still colder than the matter. The old chief lost patience at this—"Too Khodah !* Hoossein," cried he hastily ; "I believe the gins or the devil have certainly bewitched you, for no young man or son of mine could otherwise talk in so cold a fashion of such a creature as this. Punah-be-khodah ! the snow of Elwund is not colder than your heart, if we are to judge by this specimen of it. Come, lad, if there be any thing of man about you, warm up, and try to deserve your

* "In God's name!"

good fortune! Come, child,' continued he, addressing Zoolfah, 'let your sorrow cease, and be joyful; I am going to be a real father to you;—here is my eldest boy, Hoosseia, one of the finest fellows of our tribe—you shall have the honour of espousing him,—what say you to that?'

"The dreadful truth was now disclosed; this was the reason why all talk of ransom was discouraged, and why all within the walls of the harem were on their guard to avoid leading to the subject in any shape. This was the history of all the heart-sickening disappointments and protracted hopes under which my poor Zoolfah had languished. The Khan, struck with her charms and amiable qualities, resolved to bestow her upon his eldest son, whose cold unambitious disposition, and retired tastes, gave the spirited old chief almost as much uneasiness as the lawless extravagance and untameable ferocity of his brother. He hoped that the beauty of his intended wife might awaken whatever of feeling and energy lay dormant in his breast, and he was bitterly disappointed at observing how little he seemed to be affected at her first appearance.

"On the unhappy Zoolfah the effect of this discovery was dreadful. She threw herself at the feet of the Khan, shrieking, 'Oh! no, no! it cannot be—I never can marry him—I am already married to another—you cannot divorce me from my husband—you will not tear me from him for ever! You have ever been kind and good to me, do not kill me now!—send me to Ispahan, and may Allah bless you, and increase your happiness an hundredfold! Any ransom you may demand shall be yours when my husband shall hear where I am—you shall have ten slaves, all better and more beautiful than Zoolfah. See—my cheeks are withered with sorrow—they are sickly and hollow—I shall soon be dead:—kill me at once if you please, but you must not, you cannot force me to marry your son!' Her frantic grief seemed to touch the Khan, but it only induced him to remonstrate more earnestly with what he deemed the folly that would wilfully reject good fortune in her offer. 'In the name of God, child!' said he, 'what is it you want—a husband? Why, here is one in your offer, worth twenty of your pitiful merchants. And what do you suppose has become of him whom you make all this noise about?'

Why, the Affghauns have long since taken his money, or his head, be sure of that. Seek him, say you? seek him in Ispahan?—the girl is mad, stark mad: why, almost all the people there have been put to death already, and that vile Ghiljee,* Mahmood, with his rascally successor Ash-ruff, (may their father's tombs be polluted!) have been playing the very devil there—you do not know what you are saying, you are talking rank nonsense. You, a young and beautiful girl, to be set down in such a place, without a friend about you!—why, the first Affghaun soldier you met would make a slave of you, and you would then learn the difference between a scoundrel of a Ghiljee and an honest Koord. No, no! much better as it is. Here you are, and here you shall be safe; no Affghaun ever enters these mountains: my son will make you a capital husband, and you will be a good wife to him, I am sure:—and as for a divorce, why, I make a very good Cazee myself in these parts: let me see who will deny the divorce when I affirm it;—and as to dower, I will find you one myself, for I love you, child, and will have you for a daughter, say what you will.'

"The younger son now stepped forward. 'Father,' said he, 'Hoossein cares not for this beauty. Her charms have no value in his eyes—they fail to warm his cold, indifferent breast. Give her to me—I best deserve her, for I feel her worth—I loved her from the moment I beheld her, and I cannot live without her; give her, then, to one who can love her, would fight for her, and will win her, though he should die for it.'

"'Be silent, shameless,' cried the chief, darting a terrible look upon him, 'I marvel at your insolent audacity!—how dare you interfere with that which I choose to give to another? I have promised her to your brother, and his she shall be. A fine exchange, indeed, she would make of him for a profligate desperado like you! We should have you make a football of her head, and give her body to the ravens, in less than a month. You would pick a quarrel with her the moment you got tired of her, as you did with that wretched Armenian girl whom you took, and

* Of the Ghiljee tribe.

insisted upon keeping in spite of all we could do. No, begone! you shall never have her, and you shall see her no more.'

"The elder brother, who had sat a calm spectator of this scene, would now have spoken, but the wretched object of this unseemly discussion, overwhelmed with despair at all she had heard, and horror-struck at the idea of such violence as the father described and the son seemed perfectly ready to perpetrate, was no longer able to support herself, and swooned away. She was instantly borne to her apartment, where she regained her senses only to become the prey of a severe and protracted illness, which once more reduced her to the brink of the grave.

"The old chief now became convinced that the scheme he had formed of making Zoolfah the wife of his eldest son was by no means likely to be accomplished. He found indifference on the one side, and on the other a horror and repugnance so extreme, that their effects threatened to deprive him entirely of his captive. The young man himself feeling no desire for the connexion, and his mild nature revolting at the idea of occasioning so much misery to one who had never done him wrong, remonstrated with the old chief; urging him to listen to the prayer of Zoolfah, and restore her to liberty, upon receiving such ransom as he might think fit to demand. The Khan, induced perhaps as much by a kindly disposition as by the fear of losing all the profits of his acquisition, consented to this arrangement, and the Khanum conveyed to my sick and despairing wife the decision which afforded her the hope of freedom and reunion with the husband whom she loved. That hope was the most efficacious medicine she could have administered; peace of mind was succeeded by health of body, and her wonted plumpness and beauty by degrees returned."

CHAPTER XVI.

SEQUEL OF THE YOUNG MERCHANT'S STORY, CONCLUDED.

"It was arranged that an agent of the Khan's should make the requisite inquiries in Ispahan, and that the

movements of my wife, when once more able to travel, should be regulated by the intelligence he should transmit. One night, when, after indulging her imagination in many dreams of future happiness, she had retired to bed in the little apartment allotted to her, she was awakened by an indistinct noise beside her, and, rising in alarm, her terror was completed, by observing several persons cautiously moving about her room, by the faint light of a small lantern. The scream which rose to her lips was smothered ere it got vent, by the forcible application of a large rude hand on her mouth, which effectually silenced her cries for help; while at the moment she was seized, a handkerchief was bound over her mouth and eyes, a loose dress wrapped about her, and she was hurried from her bed into the open air, and borne along so roughly and rapidly, that she could form no more idea of the course which her ravishers were pursuing, than she could see or guess at their persons. In truth, her faculties were so bewildered with terror, that she could only struggle to get free, and endeavour to make her voice be heard: but all was in vain, she could only utter low, stifled murmurs, and her arms were too firmly held for her feeble strength to avail against the iron grasp of the ruffians who controlled her. Her efforts, however, succeeded at last in displacing the bandage over her eyes, so far, at least, as to obtain a partial view of what was going on.

"She was already beyond the walls of the village, borne in the arms of a man whose features she could not discern, and attended by three or four others, who moved forward altogether at a rapid pace. The moon, which was partially obscured by fleecy clouds, gave just light enough to show that they were in a secluded spot, rough with rocks and shrubby bushes, from among which were brought forth five or six horses, ready saddled and equipped. No time was lost in mounting, and a voice, which, in spite of its suppressed tones, the unfortunate Zoolfah shuddered to recognise, ordered one of the party to take charge of the lady, and see that she was firmly secured behind him. 'I,' continued he, 'must be unfettered, and prepared to resist, should any attempt be made at a rescue.' The voice was that of Mooraud Allee, the younger son of

Kooch Allee Beg ; and her heart died within her, for she felt that once within his power, there was no room for hope. Unable to struggle or exert any longer, she passively submitted, and was bound to her seat and to the man in whose charge she had been placed.

" There was scarcely light enough for them to see their way, but the party did not long continue in any beaten track. Turning their faces towards the mountain breast, they forced their way abruptly up its steep ascent, scrambling over a surface so rough, and clearing obstacles so numerous and dangerous, that the boldest riders, and the surest horses, could scarcely keep their saddles or their feet. They picked a precarious and hazardous path for several hours among shivered crags which formed the summits of the mountains ; and the care with which they kept their weapons prepared, yet concealed the lighted matches of their fire-arms, in spite of the difficulties of the way, afforded sufficient proof that they both expected and dreaded pursuit. From these precautions my wife, who by degrees had recovered her scattered senses, became convinced that the villanous scheme of which she was the victim had been exclusively the young man's contrivance, and that his father had never either known of or consented to it.

" When the grey light of morning appeared, they were traversing a wild and elevated tract, among gravelly hills interspersed with spires and crags of rock, alike destitute of vegetation and verdure. No opposition to their progress was to be dreaded here ; and they continued to proceed with unabated vigour until the man who bore my wife behind him gave the alarm, declaring that she was no longer able to support herself, but hung a dead weight upon him, by the fastenings which secured her. This was, in truth, the case : exhausted by fatigue, poor Zool-fah had become almost inanimate, and Mooraud Allee was forced to order a halt at the first convenient spot, where the horses were unbitted and fed, and such provisions as had been prepared, were produced.

" The bandages were now entirely removed from the face of my wife, and she was permitted to adjust her dress, and to convert the handkerchiefs into a veil, to conceal

her face from the gaze of her ravishers, which exceedingly distressed her. She made an attempt to entreat and remonstrate against the violence offered her, but was silenced by a stern warning to cease from giving useless trouble, or that the gag should be instantly replaced.

"A halt of two hours was thought sufficient to rest both my wife and the horses : as for the men, they were inured to much severer toil, and did not feel fatigue. Eager to secure his prize, Mooraud Allee insisted on continuing his course, and the party proceeded until darkness once more covered the earth, making but a single short halt at an encampment of wandering tribes. They came upon this camp so unexpectedly, that they could not retreat unobserved, and therefore sent forward two of their number to reconnoitre. These were met by the elders of the tribe, with whom a few words, satisfactory to both parties, being exchanged, the travellers were welcomed and taken to a tent, where food in abundance was produced, and the almost fainting Zoolfah was induced to quench her thirst with some sour milk and water. A more salutary refreshment could not have been administered ; it enabled her to support with surprising endurance the fatigues of this arduous journey.

"The clouds which during the latter part of the day, had overspread the sky, threatened a storm towards its close ; and the darkness became so excessive after nightfall that the party could not proceed ; so, choosing a level spot under the shelter of some overhanging rocks, they once more fed their horses, and mustering close together, in order to secure themselves as much as possible from the cold blasts that began to howl around, the men went to sleep for a while. As for Zoolfah, they made her up a couch of the numuds and horse-cloths in a retired and sheltered corner of the natural cavern, and, after offering such refreshment as they had to give, they left her to herself.

"But the horror of her situation, surrounded as she was by reckless and ferocious banditti, and entirely in the power of one whose conduct had proved him to be capable of every possible atrocity, was such as utterly to banish sleep, in spite of her deadly fatigue. Trembling with terror she

shrank into herself, and would have sought refuge even in the depths of the grave, to shun the fate which she could not doubt was preparing for her. But the tortures of apprehension were not all she was now doomed to suffer; for the silence which reigned after the party had arranged themselves for the night, was broken by the light tread of an approaching foot, and, looking upwards, the dark and massive form of Mooraud Allee was seen relieved against the gloomy sky, and standing close by her couch. Uttering a shriek, my terrified wife sprang from her recumbent posture, and sought instinctively to fly; but the powerful hand of her ravisher was instantly upon her arm, and retained her in its iron gripe. She sank again upon the couch, and faintly implored his mercy. 'What dread you, beauteous Zoofah?' said he, softening as he might the rough tones of his voice, and sitting down beside her: 'you see before you the most devoted of your slaves. The cruel harshness of my father has driven me indeed to a measure which may seem harsh and unjustifiable in your eyes; but who that sees the beloved object of his soul about to be torn from him for ever, would hesitate to do as I have done? Seek not then to fly me, lovely Zoofah! but rather increase my devotion by yielding a gentle and willing consent to my happiness, and thus bind me to yourself for ever.'

"The tone in which these words were uttered, was but ill calculated to reassure his trembling victim: for though the language was that of persuasion, the manner was that of a master to his slave, when he is resolved to be obeyed; and he scarcely suppressed the exultation which he felt at his successful villany.

"'Alas, my lord!' said Zoofah in reply, 'what would you have from a wretch like me?—what charms can a married woman, so forlorn, so miserable as I am, have for a chief like you, who can command the love of so many beauties? Be generous, my lord; be like your noble father:—do not detain me longer from him whom duty as well as inclination lead me to join—restore my liberty, and claim any ransom you may choose to name.'

"'Restore you to liberty? permit you to rejoin your husband?' repeated he with a scornful smile; 'and think

you, lovely Zoolfah ! that I am likely to yield the prize which has been won by so hazardous, so decisive a measure, to a woman's entreaty or a woman's tears ?—No ! mine you now are, and mine you shall remain, so long as it is my will to keep you ; and let me advise you, as you value your own comfort, nay, as you regard your life, to grant me with a willing heart that affection, or at least that favour, which will otherwise be wrung from you by force.' With these words he seized upon her, resolved as it appeared to make good his threats, regardless of the cries and struggles of my wretched wife, which now rent the air. But his detestable purpose was fearfully interrupted.

"The storm which had gathered around, had for some time begun to break in cold drizzling rain, succeeded by heavy showers and a loud wind. The thunder, distant at first, but gradually rolling onward, now burst in reiterated peals over head, and the vivid flashes of lightning illuminated all the dreary scene. Regardless of the Almighty voice which spoke thus awfully in tempest, the wicked Mooraud Allee was seeking to effect his iniquitous object, when a flash brighter than the sun at noon-day, accompanied by a terrible crash, shook both the heavens and the earth, and made every one start to their feet, just as a huge mass of rock, close to their resting place, was scattered in splinters around. The struggling Zoolfah dropped from his hold, as, looking for a moment wildly around him, he staggered and fell to the ground. 'Allah Kereem ! what may this mean ? where am I ? who art thou, fiend ?' cried he, after a minute's pause. No answer was returned—and Mooraud Allee, trembling with superstitious awe, slowly arose and retired from the couch of Zoolfah to his own resting place. The storm had now spent its fury, and was gradually rolling away ; but its salutary effect continued, for Zoolfah suffered no farther molestation during the night.

"The march was resumed on the morrow, through an equally wild and difficult country. Towards noon, as the party wound slowly up the steep and craggy face of a mountain, the attention of Zoolfah was attracted by some words which were passing in an under tone between Mooraud Allee himself, and an old man who seemed to be one,

of his principal confidants. 'But in the name of God!' demanded the old man, in reply, as it seemed, to something which the other had been relating, 'what do you suppose it to have been?' 'The Devil himself knows best,' responded Mooraud Allee, 'for he it surely must have been that sent that cursed storm, and the infernal vision that rode upon it, to disturb me at so critical a moment, and cheat me of my promised happiness. Why, Caussim, I swear by my father's head, and by my own soul, that I saw it as plainly as I now see you:—the flash had passed away, and the gloom of total blindness had covered my eyes, when that bright figure stood before me, with menacing eyes, and waved me from the spot where I lay by her who would so soon have been my own. I am no woman, as you know, to be frightened at a shadow; but may I never see the Hours of Paradise, or taste the joys of Paradise upon earth in the arms of a willing fair one, if the vision bore not the form and feature of Haweeza, the Armenian girl, whose death was to be attributed rather to her own obstinate folly than to my hasty anger! I did love that creature, Caussim; and the astonishment, nay the terror which seized me on seeing the dead interpose thus between me and my purpose, suspended every faculty. Shame be upon me! I slunk away like a detected thief, and had no courage to return to the charge. But I will be even with her yet for this; to-night we shall be safely lodged with my friend Zekee Khan,—no storm will trouble us there, and no Haweeza shall interpose again to thwart me; mine she shall be then, in spite of hell or heaven themselves.'—'Ay, ay,' replied Caussim, with a repressed laugh, 'I do not doubt it, sir; no fear but you will redeem such a pledge! All I wonder at is, that you should have allowed yourself to be foiled last night by any false alarm; for false I cannot but believe it, however powerful its effect may have been. But come, I must push forward and give notice of your coming at Kallah Ahendewar.—Before you can descend into the valley beyond the pass, I shall have reached the fort. God give you a safe journey till then!' So saying, and saluting his master as he passed, he rode forward, and was soon out of sight.

"This dialogue was but ill calculated to comfort or en-

courage its unhappy object, who required no such farther proof of her ravisher's determination to effect her ruin ; and who felt with a sinking heart every circumstance that confirmed the unlimited control he exercised over her fate : nevertheless, she tried to brace her mind to the task of resisting to the uttermost every effort, whether of fraud or force, which should be directed against her virtue, and resolved to sacrifice life itself, rather than consent to the loss of her own honour or that of her husband.

" In the mean time they reached the summit of the pass, and, after winding for nearly a fursung along a dangerous chasm, which seemed to have cleft the mountains in sunder, they reached a point from whence they overlooked a very wild and singular valley. It was enclosed by rugged mountains, the feet of which were scantily clothed with dwarf oaks. A vast quantity of grey stones, the wreck of the shattered peaks above, covered the greater part of the middle region, while a rich green tint among the rocks that formed their summits, gave token of the plentiful pasture enjoyed by the flocks and herds that fed there. A full and rapid stream, formed by the union of two principal branches, and fringed with wood of better growth, ran in a rough and stony bed, which straggled from one side of the narrow glen to the other, sometimes running along the foot of lofty walls of rock, and sometimes winding through a patch of green meadow. The point of junction between the two torrents was a bold and lofty rock, the termination of a mountainous ridge, nowise inferior in altitude to those which bounded the principal glen. This rock rose precipitously on every side but that on which it was connected with the parent ridge, and there, a narrow neck, formed for defence by the hand of nature, afforded the only means of approach. A station so peculiarly adapted for security, was not likely to be overlooked in a country like this ; and accordingly, the level ground upon its summit, comprehending an area of no inconsiderable extent, had from time immemorial been the site of a fortress, which was always the stronghold of some bold predatory chieftain.

" The Kallah Ahendewar*—such was the name of this

* The Fort with Walls of Iron.

stronghold—was at this time in possession of Zekee Khan, a chief of the Lac tribe, whose father, a hardy and lawless freebooter, after having laid the neighbouring country under contribution for thirty years, had been killed some little time before, in an expedition against a tribe of Bucktiarees. Zekee Khan, a zealous follower of his father's footsteps, was an acquaintance, and, as he professed himself, a friend of Mooraud Allee, who had more than once assisted him with his followers, his counsel, and the might of his own arm, in his murderous enterprizes, partaking, no doubt, of the gain which they produced. Mooraud Allee, confiding in these assurances of friendship, made choice of this inaccessible retreat to secure himself from all pursuit: he was satisfied that here no vengeance could reach him, and no force could rend his victim from his grasp. The Kallah Ahendewar was therefore destined to be the termination of his present expedition, and the prison of poor Zoolfah.

“After a long and painful descent from the mountain, they drew near to the place, and its dark features became one by one more prominent and imposing. The original fabric, which was attributed to the great Jemsheed, had been formed of ponderous masses of stone and lime, so firmly cemented, that time itself had failed of making its usual impression on them. Several different superstructures had been reared upon this solid foundation; and each in its turn had contributed to the imposing group of walls, towers, and bastions, which now crowned and encircled the whole rock. But the reigning character of the place was that of gloomy strength. The dark grey walls, following the irregular inflections of the rock in curious points and angles, were diversified in some places with a tower, a lofty bastion, or the roof of a house, rising above the general level; and the indentings of embrasures and crennels sometimes relieved the monotony of its outline; but, on the whole, the aspect of the place was dreary and forbidding; and as, after a weary circuit which afforded ample time for contemplating the walls of her future prison, my wretched wife was led through the heavy gates and intricate passages of its outer works, her heart entirely failed her, and she felt as if hope itself, which never quits the human heart, could find no entrance there.

"The party was met at the outer gateway by a brother of the Khan, attended by a suitable train of his officers and household, to welcome Mooraud Allee in a strain of due respect. He was conducted to the residence prepared for him, and Zoolfah was received by an eunuch, and certain female attendants, who, lifting her half-dead from the horse, carried her into the inner apartments, and laid her carefully on a soft couch. A bath was instantly prepared, and every possible means were taken to remove the painful effects of her fatiguing journey. The attendants then quitted the apartment, and left her to repose.

"The first use she made of this liberty was to examine her prison. It was a small apartment, neatly fitted up, with most of the usual requisites of female accommodation; the light was admitted through one small window, which opened at a great height above the floor, in a wall of immense thickness. On clambering up with some difficulty, she shuddered to behold that it looked down upon a high and giddy precipice, at the foot of which foamed a furious torrent; so that escape on that side was utterly impossible, except by a frightful death. But even this dismal resource had been guarded against, for the window was secured with cross bars of iron. As to the door, it opened upon a passage bordering a small court, which seemed to form a part of the Khan's own Zenanah, and was consequently securely guarded. At sight of these ominous precautions, the wretched Zoolfah sick with the conviction of inevitable fate, fell down exhausted on the couch, and abandoned herself for some time to despair. But her resolution returned by degrees, and she endeavoured to fortify her mind for the hour of trial. Determined to part with life rather than suffer her honour to be sullied, she had found means to secrete a small knife about her person; and assuring herself that it was still there, and at hand in case of need, she lay awaiting what might be preparing for her in silent but intense agitation.

"The remainder of the day passed over undisturbed. Once or twice a female slave came in, to know if any thing was wanted by the lady, but retired immediately on receiving a negative reply, and the night closed in without any cause of alarm. It might be more than two hours after

- the time of evening prayers, when the door opened, and several attendants, bearing lights, approached to Zoolfah, entreating her to rise and array herself in a rich dress which they presented to her. 'Whence come these things?' inquired Zoolfah: 'on whose part are they sent? and why should a prisoner, for as such I must consider myself, be thus decked out?'—'It is not for us to answer these questions, lady,' replied one, the principal among them; 'nor need you make yourself uneasy on the subject. Here no female has any choice but that of passive obedience, and it will be well that you be found disposed to yield implicitly to the arrangements of those in whose power you now are.'—To have attempted resistance in a point of trivial consequence, would have been provocation of evil, so she permitted the slaves to dress and ornament her, and they seated her at the upper end of the room upon a carpet of fine felt.

"A banquet was now brought in, a white cloth was spread before her, and rich dishes in profusion were placed upon it, while sherbet and wine sparkled in vessels of china and silver beside them. When all was ready, the slaves withdrew, and she alone remained awaiting the event in speechless anxiety.

"Not long was she suffered to wait; the door opened once more, and the hateful form of Mooraud Allee entered, unannounced, with all the authoritative air of a master. He, likewise had changed his garb, and his ungainly figure was now clad in gorgeous apparel.

"Disregarding the scream of horror which burst involuntarily from poor Zoolfah, as she shrank from his approach, he walked up to the couch, and seating himself by her, took her unwilling hand, and in a voice intended to be soothing, expressed his hopes that she had in some degree recovered the fatigue of her rapid journey; a journey, he again assured her, the necessity of which he regretted; 'and I trust,' added he, 'that I may now look for a more favourable reception from the lovely Zoolfah, than she was disposed to grant to her slave when last he had the happiness of a private interview. She will do well to remember that there is no chance of interruption

here ; in this place, she is known only as my wife, and she must submit to be treated as such.'

" 'Your wife !' exclaimed Zoolfah, pale with terror at the expression of his countenance, as much as at his words — 'Never ! never !—it cannot, shall not be ! You may torture me, you may kill me, and work your pleasure on my wretched corse, but while I live I never will be your wife !'

" 'You are right,' replied he with a sneer ; 'that detested title need not be forced upon you ;—but what think you of being my slave, my minion ? the creature of my pleasure while the fancy lasts—the worthless, rejected drudge of my will when it ceases ? The day may come when you shall eagerly but fruitlessly solicit the offers you now reject—the despised and cast-off mistress of Mooraud may rue the hour in which she refused the honoured name of wife ! Reflect, then, lovely Zoolfah—yet once again I tender you that proud distinction ; be wise, and accept it, for I swear that from hence I do not depart without full possession of your charms !'

" 'Never ! never !—once more I tell thee, man, that nothing but the corse of Zoolfah shall ever be subjected to thy insults !—Leave me !—leave me instantly ! I am not so helpless as you think. Once the angry voice of Heaven interposed to save me from the pollution of thy touch ; and think not because I seem alone and in thy power, that therefore thy wicked purpose shall be accomplished !—'That we shall presently see,' said Mooraud, and he rose with the words, intending to seize her in his arms ; but my virtuous and noble wife, springing suddenly to the other end of the apartment, gained time to draw the little dagger which she had prepared :—'There is no resource but this, then !' exclaimed she ;—'oh ! Aboo Talib, I shall see thee no more, but I die thy unpolluted wife !' While yet uttering these words, with a desperate blow she plunged the sharp blade up to the handle in her bosom : the monster rushed forward just in time to catch her as she staggered backwards, and was covered with her spouting blood.

"This was a catastrophe he had never anticipated, and one which effectually frustrated his diabolical intentions.

Slowly he bore the pale and bleeding body of his victim to the couch, where she lay without sense or motion. He believed that she was already dead; and somewhat shocked, but much more disappointed, by her sudden fate, he vociferated for help; the attendants rushed in; and hastily framing some tale to account for the bloody spectacle before them, he quitted the apartment, and left, as he believed, the body alone of the miserable Zoolfah to their care.

"The pain of drawing the knife from the wound, which was followed by a new flow of blood, produced a groan from my poor wife, and gave her attendants the first hint that life was not totally extinct. They staunched the blood with bandages, and placed her in an easy posture on the couch: it was long before the light of returning animation beamed in her half-closed eyes, and it was with a fearful shudder that she first opened them, and gazed wildly around; but, when she saw none but female countenances about her, the terror of her look subsided, she closed her eyes again and lay perfectly quiet, uttering only now and then a deep sigh.

"There is a benevolent and sympathetic kindness in the female heart, which, when unchecked by any feeling of jealousy or hatred, is ever readily excited by a suffering object, and particularly if that object happen to be a female, young and interesting like the luckless Zoolfah. The women of the Khan's family, when they heard of the accident, ascribing it naturally to some unmanly violence on the part of the supposed husband, flocked one and all to see and make offer of their attentions. Full of indignation at the savage cruelty which, although they were ignorant of the whole truth, could alone, they felt, have led to so fatal a catastrophe, they resolved, if possible, to make her tyrant feel; and therefore continued to give out that her life was in the greatest danger, although it was soon discovered that the knife, glancing along a rib, had failed to penetrate the chest, and therefore had not inflicted a mortal wound. They soon, indeed, observed the dread which she entertained of her tyrant's visits; and with the humane design of exempting her from the misery of his presence, they continued to maintain the

belief of her danger even after her convalescence was well advanced.

"But Providence, which at its own good pleasure baffles or promotes the best laid plans of mortals, and confounds alike the wisdom of the sage and the power of the tyrant, had already decreed that my unfortunate wife should be delivered from the hands of this miscreant by an agency on which he never calculated. The adventure of the wounded lady had made no little noise in the harem; her beauty was the theme of every tongue, and so highly was it vaunted of by the women of the Khan, that he became desirous of judging for himself how far it merited their praises.

"It never is a matter of difficulty for the master of a house, particularly if he be a chief of power so unlimited as Zekee Khan, to obtain a sight, unknown to herself, of any female who may chance to be within his walls; nor did any scruples of conscience or of delicacy withhold the Khan from enjoying this gratification. Unseen himself, he beheld Zoolfah, and was so much captivated with her beauty, that he resolved on appropriating her to himself. He therefore caused his friend to be informed that the lady was not likely to recover; and when Mooraud Allee insisted on being allowed an interview, he coldly replied, that, after the violence which had already taken place, he did not feel justified in permitting the continuance of an intercourse which might be fatal to an unfortunate person under his roof, and therefore under his protection. Mooraud Allee stormed and blustered; but the Khan observing that his own stronghold was not the place where he could submit to be bullied, and adding his regret that the air of Kallah Ahendewar appeared to have disordered the health of his guest, he took the hint and his leave together, and quitted the country of Zekee Khan in no small haste.

"Congratulations on account of this fortunate deliverance were offered to my wife, and a hint was conveyed along with them, which gave her much reason to dread that her situation was but little altered for the better. When her recovery was complete, she received a formal intimation that it was the Khan's intention to solicit an

interview in the apartment of his lady. The thoughts of such a scene renewed all her apprehensions and distress, but she was unexpectedly relieved; for tidings having reached the Khan that a plundering party of Affghauns had penetrated into Louristan farther than was customary or safe, he suddenly assembled his followers and quitted the castle, to assist the other chiefs of that province in repelling them.

"A day or two after his departure, while, yet trembling with apprehension, Zoolfah was musing over her melancholy fate, and looking forward to the future with despondency, her door opened, and a stranger female of great beauty, richly dressed, and attended by two veiled slaves, entered her apartment. 'You are surprised, lady,' said the stranger, seating herself by the side of Zoolfah, and taking her hand with a smile of the most fascinating sweetness—'you are at a loss how to interpret this visit of a stranger; but be not apprehensive, though you have no knowledge of me—I am your sincere friend, and I am come hither to prove it. In me you see Zeenut-ul-nissa, Khanum, the favourite wife of Zekee Khan, the chief in whose power you now are.'

"Zoolfah had frequently heard of this lady during her stay within the walls of Ahendewar, although till now she had been a stranger to her person; nor had report been silent with regard to her character. She was said to have a proud, ambitious spirit; and though her temper was violent and revengeful, she had, it was understood, sufficient craft and self-command, when her interest required the effort, to veil her wrath under a mask of smiles, and Zoolfah thought she could detect somewhat of this in the air of cordial friendship which it was her pleasure to assume upon this her first and long-deferred visit. It was not, however, her interest, nor her wish, to offend the Khanum, and therefore rising with a respectful salute, she begged to be honoured with her commands.

"Be seated, my dear Zoolfah,' said the Khanum, with another sweet smile, in which, however, might be traced an air of patronage:—'I have heard much about you, which has awakened a powerful interest in your fate: circumstances of no small importance, have deprived me of

the pleasure of visiting you during your illness, and from listening to your story from your own mouth ; but now I ask that satisfaction, which I hope you will not refuse. We have time enough upon our hands this morning, for I have provided against all interruption, and I entreat that you will now consider me, what in fact you will find me, your sincere and zealous friend—and that you will treat me with the confidence which such a one deserves.'

"Misfortune, that great instructress, had taught poor Zoolfah to be cautious in yielding her confidence ; and this caution was not decreased by the knowledge she had of the Khanum's reputed character. But there was nothing calculated to excite suspicion in this inquiry ; and so fascinating was the semblance of sympathy to one who had long been deprived of all the consolations of friendship, that it cannot be wondered at if my unfortunate wife was easily induced to comply with a request, which, in truth, was equivalent to a command. She told the Khanum so much of her story as sufficed to make her perfectly acquainted with her situation ; and concluded with an earnest entreaty that she would interest herself in procuring her liberty ; adding, that whatever ransom might be required, should be paid the moment she reached Ispahan.

" ' My dear Zoolfah ! ' observed the Khanum, when the former had concluded—' I pity you most sincerely. Good Heavens ! what a fate, to be separated so long as you have been from such a husband ?—and he, poor man ! what must not he have endured, provided, as I doubt not is the case, he has survived the bloody scenes at Ispahan ? But I trust your ill-fortune is drawing to a close ; it shall be my business to give another colour to your fate. Now listen to me ;—you have fortunately got rid of one tyrant, but without some nice management you will not find your condition much improved. The Khan, my husband, has unhappily seen you, and has taken a liking to your person. I know this full surely, and I am but too well acquainted with the customary course of such fancies. Totally in his power as you are, you could not avoid the fate you dread ; but his passion once gratified, the toy would lose its value in his eyes, and he might, perhaps dispose of you to the next slave-merchant that should come

to the castle. Such is the Khan, such the fickleness of his affection;—well as I know him, even I find it no easy task to fix his fancy and retain his volatile affections.’—She gazed haughtily round for a while, as if she felt the sacrifice which pride was making to interest; but her features resumed their sweet expression, and the consciousness of superior beauty lighted up her face with a glow of exultation, as her eye fell on a mirror near; she then continued her address to Zoolfah. ‘I have perhaps given you unnecessary pain, by describing misfortunes which it is my design to avert;—your heroism deserves a better fate. You shall regain your freedom, you shall revisit Ispahan, you will find and be re-united to your husband?—The Khan will continue absent for some time, and I possess interest and adherents sufficient in the castle to ensure your leaving it in safety; prepare yourself, therefore; if you wish for freedom it shall be yours to-morrow night; drop not a hint of what has passed between us; rouse not suspicion by the least peculiarity in manner or conduct, but be ready to accompany the person who will be with you to-morrow at midnight, and who will place you in the hands of a trusty friend, whose orders are to see you safe in the hands of your friends at Ispahan. No thanks!—only comply with my directions—may God protect you, fair Zoolfah! Farewell!’ Having thus spoken, the Khanum, embracing her with another sweet smile, arose and quitted the apartment.

“It were vain as well as useless, to dwell on the joy of Zoolfah at this most unexpected brightening of her prospects. It was long, indeed, before she could believe that all she had just listened to was more real than the dreams that had so often mocked her hopes. When, after a while, she reflected with more composure on what had passed, she was inclined to view with something like jealousy and suspicion the fair offers of this kind lady, who thus for the first time had visited her solitude; but after pondering over the subject as dispassionately as she could, she saw no fair grounds for distrust. It was perfectly natural that a favourite wife should be jealous of a threatened rival, and that she should endeavour to remove her if possible;—that in doing so she should bestow a

benefit upon that rival by delivering her from a gloomy prison, was a contingency which did not by any means tend to impugn her good faith. At all events, what fate could be worse than remaining where she was, exposed to the worst of insults, and to agonies of anxiety and terror, which made her life a burden? Come what might, she resolved to confide in the Khanum, and accept of the protection she offered her to Ispahan.

"The remaining hours were passed in restless and painful anxiety by Zoolfah. In vain she tried to sleep; although conscious that all her bodily and mental powers would be required in the approaching effort, her eyelids refused to close: or if for a moment she fell into a doze, it was troubled and uneasy; and she awoke with frightful dreams of discovery and prolonged imprisonment. Darkness at length once more covered the castle, and her terror lest any untoward event should occur to interrupt her purposed escape, became almost too much to endure; her limbs trembled, and her soul was sick even to faintness. In this way did three or four weary hours pass on, when a low tap was heard at her door, and upon opening it two female slaves made their appearance and gave the concerted signal. Zoolfah, who was in perfect readiness, did not delay a moment. They threw an Arab cloak over her person, and thus enveloped they traversed many courts and passages, which all were silent and unguarded.

"The females now stopped, and delivered over their charge into the hands of two men, bidding her be of good cheer, for these were the Khanum's people, appointed to be her faithful conductors. The darkness, the dreariness of the house, and the solitary silence of the vast fabric, imparted a sensation of awe bordering upon terror to the poor Zoolfah, who shuddered as she watched the retiring forms of her female attendants, as if she had then parted with the last of her friends. But a moment's recollection of the horrors she was flying from, and the necessity of retaining all her firmness, recalled her to herself, and she followed her conductors. No words were spoken; and in a few minutes they reached the massy gateway, where only one or two guards were seen lounging at their post. After a short parley with these, a small wicket was open-

ed in the heavy iron-clenched woodwork of the gate, and they found themselves in a short passage. An angle at the farther extremity of this brought them abruptly to the outer gate of all, which was also opened after a short delay ; and then the cold breeze of night blew round them, uncontrolled by the walls of the castle.

"The travellers had now no molestation to dread, and no farther obstacle appeared to oppose their progress. A short way onward, they reached a spot where two horses and an ambling mule were found in charge of a servant : my wife was placed on the latter, while the two horses were immediately mounted by her conductors, and the whole party, still without uttering a word, pushed rapidly forward. After a march of rather more than two hours, they reached a miserable village, consisting of a few mud huts, surrounded with black tents, and here one of the men informed Zoolfah that they must halt for a while. She remonstrated against so wanton a loss of time ; but the man, with something of a sneer, bid her not be uneasy, that the danger was now over, that the horses required to be fed, and that they were here to be joined by a person in the Khanum's particular confidence, who was to conduct her to Ispahan. A pang of suspicion and alarm crossed the mind of my wife as she listened to these palpable evasions ; but she was helpless, and could offer no resistance to whatever might be intended,—so she held her peace, and did as she was bid:

"The wretched hut where they now halted was inhabited, as it seemed, by a single old woman, who received the weary Zoolfah with very little ceremony. But before much time had elapsed, a fat, middle-aged man entered the room, and was announced as her future conductor to Ispahan. She was particularly struck with the blunt unceremonious manners of this person, and her alarm increased at so unaccountable a transmission of her person from one rude attendant to another. The men now spoke together apart, with much gesticulation, and many significant glances were directed towards my wife, as if they would have scrutinized her person even through the thick veil and cloak which enveloped her from head to foot : at last he said aloud, ' It is well, I am satisfied ; give your mistress

this, and tell her she may rely on my obedience to her commands.' The whole then withdrew, and left Zoolfah and the old woman alone in the hut.

"There was something inexplicable in the words, and still more so in the manner of this man, which increased the uneasy suspicions that had arisen in the mind of Zoolfah. Turning to the old woman, she entreated her to tell her who that person was, what he had in charge regarding her, and whether they should soon set out for Ispahan. 'Trouble not yourself, child, about these matters at present,' said she, 'you will soon be made acquainted with every thing; meantime, be content, to know that you are in safety, and will in due time be conveyed to Ispahan. And now be advised and go to sleep; it yet wants some hours of day, and there is a long journey before you on the morrow.' This equivocal reply was far from removing the suspicions of my wife; but she considered that she had at all events escaped from her dreary prison, and was under a roof with one of her own sex: these were blessings to be thankful for, and they went a good way to soothe her mind;—fatigue triumphed over anxiety for a season, and she was soon buried in profound repose.

"The sun was yet low, when the voice of the old woman awakened Zoolfah from sleep, and bade her arise and prepare for her journey. On coming forth from the hut, she found no one but the person whose unceremonious behaviour had alarmed her the night before, attended by several servants, all attired for the journey. The manners of this man had undergone no improvement; on the contrary, there was a harshness in the tone of command he assumed, and a disagreeable air of vulgarity conspicuous in his person and address, which renewed all her uneasiness, and increased the suspicions she entertained as to his character, and the views of the Khanum in committing her to his charge. She inquired for her two former conductors, and was informed, that having executed their orders, they had returned to the fort. 'And is this the person who is to conduct me to Ispahan?'—'It is; be satisfied.'

"Every thing being ready, she was led out of the village by the old woman, who was likewise attired for a journey, and taken to a place where half a dozen mules

stood prepared for the march ; some loaded with baggage, and others with covered cradles for the accommodation of travellers. Here they found her new conductor, who had moved on before, and who now impatiently summoned the old woman, and bade her make haste and lose no more time. The coarse violence of his language, and the air of a master which he assumed, had now alarmed my wife so much, that she stopped short, and turning with clasped hand to her companion—‘ For the sake of Allah !’ exclaimed she, ‘ and by your own life ! I entreat you to tell me who this rude person may be, and why he bears himself so strangely in my presence. Whither is he to conduct me ? what is to be my fate ? Have pity on a miserable creature, who is bowed to the earth by reiterated misfortunes !’

“ ‘ I tell you,’ replied the woman, ‘ that you are to be carried to Ispahan, and that no harm shall befall you—I ——’ ‘ What is the meaning of all this ?’ interrupted the man, gruffly ; ‘ why keep up a farce like this any longer ? why not tell the truth at once ? You belong now to me, young woman ; I am a slave-merchant ; the Khanum has sold you to me ; I have paid her her own price for you, and you are now to be carried, along with some other ladies in the same situation, to the great city of Ispahan.’ A thunderbolt could not have produced a more sudden effect than this unfeeling speech upon the wretched Zool-fah. With a piercing shriek she fell senseless to the earth, where she lay for some minutes, as if her spirit had for ever departed. Motives of interest, if not of compassion, now induced her master to render her every possible assistance ; nor was it without a great deal of trouble that she recovered under the old woman’s care. But she revived only to a keener and more torturing sense of the treachery of the Khanum. With frantic exclamations she addressed the merchant, entreating him to spare her, to restore her to her husband ; and her ravings became so alarming that he began to fear her brain was turned, and set himself to soothe her as best he could, directing the old woman also to make use of every method of kindness in effecting the same purpose. Fortunately, a new idea struck my wife, whose mind till then had only been alive to the dreadful impres-

sion that she was a slave, the property of another, liable to be sold to any one who might fancy her,—to be exposed, without reserve, to the same evils from which she had with so much difficulty escaped,—or to live, perhaps, a household drudge, for ever separated from her husband. ‘Did you say I was to be taken to Ispahan?’ exclaimed she eagerly.—‘Certainly!’ replied the woman; ‘it is to Ispahan you are now going.’—‘Oh! then, I may once more meet with my husband, after all! Oh, mother! if you have any pity, if you can feel the least compassion for a poor unhappy creature, be a friend to me now; speak in my behalf to the merchant, my master. I will give no more trouble; I will ask for nothing more;—only let me be carried to Ispahan without delay; let him seek out my husband, and whatever price he chooses to demand for me, he shall freely command.’

“‘Be calm, my daughter,’ replied the woman moved at the poignancy of her distress; ‘be contented. I have told you the truth: you are now quitting this wild country for the city of Ispahan; Khojah Gholaum Hussun, though his manners are not the gentlest, is not a hard-hearted man: he is a slave-merchant, it is true, but what then? every one must have a calling, and follow it. All he requires is, his fair profit; and all he has promised the Khanum is, that you shall never return to Kallah Ahendewar,—a pledge which, I doubt not, you will readily confirm. And as to your ransom,—if, as you say, you have a husband who chooses to recover you, he will have a fair opportunity for doing so; nay, I am confident that the Khojah will take pains to seek him out, provided he sees a likelihood of receiving a just compensation for his trouble; for in such a case he could not expose you to public view, like other slaves. Collect your scattered senses, therefore, my child, and hope for the best, while I speak a word or two with the Khojah.’

“After some conversation with the old woman, who, in fact, was a species of duenna, whose duty it was to watch the conduct of his slaves,—the merchant, approaching my wife, assured her, with a more respectful air, and in less offensive terms, that she should have no cause for complaint so long as she might remain in his possession, and

promised his best assistance, on their arrival at the capital, in discovering her husband. 'You see, madam,' added he, 'that I am inclined to place every confidence in the truth of your story: should you be deceiving me in any part of it, the consequences will rest upon your own head.'

"No farther time was now lost in commencing the journey. Zoolfah was placed in one of the cradles suspended on either side of a mule, and in the other was stowed the old duenna, whom she preferred to an utter stranger, and who was by no means deficient in kindness. The merchant was as good as his word; and so far from giving any reason of complaint during the journey, he paid great regard to the health and comfort of my wife, and in more instances than one curtailed the day's march in order to accommodate her. They reached Ispahan on the seventh day without accident; and no sooner had the Khojah established himself and his slaves in convenient lodgings, than, in compliance with the impatient wishes of Zoolfah, he commenced inquiries regarding myself. It was not long before he found out one of my agents, who, the moment he became satisfied that the slave he offered for sale was no other than the wife for whose recovery his employer had lavished so much money and suffered so much anxiety, lost no time in paying down the price required, and added such a present as left the merchant no cause to regret the attention he had shown her, or the trouble she had cost him.

"But though Zoolfah was thus restored to freedom and to safety, there did not appear to be any immediate likelihood of her attaining the object for which she had so long and earnestly panted—a re-union with myself. The distracted state of Persia had rendered communication between distant provinces most difficult, and often impossible: from this circumstance, together with the changes and casualties which had occurred among my various agents, the place of my abode had been almost lost sight of. The length of time also which had elapsed since the loss of my wife, and the constant succession of disappointments which had attended all our efforts to obtain intelligence regarding her, had thrown a colour of hopelessness over the whole affair, which, caused a relaxation on their

parts, and almost induced myself to despond. Thus it was not surprising that the happy tidings of her safety did not reach me for many months after her restoration, and came even then by so circuitous and uncertain a channel, that I could not feel assured of its reality until I actually reached Ispahan.

"It is needless for me to dwell on my delight at recovering after so many perils, the dear object of my unswerving love, pure and unsullied, kind and affectionate as ever. I vowed that I would henceforth watch over her with double vigilance, and devote my life to make her happy. The government of the Affghauns was indeed not the most comfortable or secure to live under; but I felt satisfied that by adopting a few simple precautions pointed out by common sense, by avoiding the least appearance of wealth or show, by going but little abroad, and taking especial care to associate with none but persons of whose probity and prudence I could be assured, I might continue to reside in safety, even in the capital itself, surrounded by our oppressors, until some happy change should occur to restore a better state of things. The seeds of revolution were at that time evidently springing up in every quarter, and we have cause to thank the Almighty that the skill and valour of your General has delivered us from the rod of our oppressors, and seated a native monarch once more upon the throne of Persia."

Such was the story which my friend communicated to me at various times, as leisure and opportunity occurred, but which I have thought it better to give in one unbroken narrative.

In spite of the rigour of the winter, which then was at its height, Nader had no sooner seen the Shah confirmed on the throne and in the abode of his ancestors, and lent his aid to settle the most pressing business which was entailed upon the conqueror by the change of rulers and of measures throughout the country, than, in order to complete his work, and drive the Affghauns entirely out of Persia, he marched with his army for Sheerauz, where Ashruff, finding himself unpursued, had halted and taken up his quarters, in hopes, as was given out, of maintaining himself in the province of Fars.

The state of my health rendered me unable to accompany my commander on this expedition, or to yield my slender aid towards gaining those fresh successes, which added another star to the brilliant constellation of his glory. In spite of his losses in men and cattle from the severe cold, he reached the neighbourhood of Sheerauz in twenty days, and after a bloody and decisive action near Zergoon, in which the enemy were routed with great slaughter, he entered the city, from which the few remaining Affghans had fled in great confusion and in miserable plight. Few indeed of these wretched men escaped to see their country again; and it was not long ere accounts were received that the usurper, after suffering extreme misery, had paid the forfeit of his crimes.

During the progress of these events, I remained with my friend Meerza Aboo Talib at Ispahan, until, being once more fit for duty, I was ordered to take charge of a detachment returning to Mushed, consisting chiefly of men who had received permission to return to their families, and who were charged with the convoy of a large quantity of prisoners, goods, and treasure.

It was understood that symptoms of disaffection had begun to show themselves in some of the ever-turbulent border districts of Khorasan, and a reinforcement of troops was deemed necessary in that province, until his Highness himself should be able to return there. This he proposed doing before proceeding to humble the pride of the Turks and reduce the rest of Irak to obedience, an undertaking which was already determined upon.

Before quitting Ispahan, I took the precaution of turning into money all the goods and valuables I had received, either as presents or in plunder; and having already had some experience of the uncertain life of a soldier, and the difficulty he has in preserving whatever property he may acquire, I resolved to place the greater part of my worldly possessions in safer hands than my own. Aboo Talib was very prudent: he was rich, and I had the best reason for esteeming him one of my sincerest friends. I had moreover the firmest confidence in his integrity, and felt that if he would but accept the trust, my property would be perfectly secure against the day of need: at the same

time that, should any accident befall me, there was none to whom I was more willing to bequeath it.

"I readily accept your confidence and deposit, my dear Ismael," said Abou 'Talib, when I proposed the matter to him; "I commend your prudence in disposing of your money safely, out of reach of the temptations and hazards common to a soldier's life. I rejoice in the confidence with which you honour me, and promise that your property shall not lessen in my hands, so long as I continue alive. But I may die, my friend; and it is right you should have an acknowledgment, properly witnessed, of your deposit. I promise that you shall have one, so formal and binding that neither heir nor Cazeer shall find it possible to dispute its truth."

When the time of my departure arrived, and I was taking leave of my friend, he put into my hands a sealed paper. "Here," said he, "is the proper acknowledgment for your money; let me ask, as a proof of your confidence, that you will not open it, at least till you reach Mushed." I readily promised compliance.—"I have one more favour to beg," continued he: "I will not distress you by offers of pecuniary assistance, which at present you do not require; and you know full well that should the case be altered in future, you may command my purse;—but you must not hurt your friend by refusing a trifling mark of his affectionate regard. The baggage of a soldier should be light, and should contain nothing unbefitting his profession:—You will not transgress this rule by accepting what I have provided.—And now, dearest Ismael, farewell!—I trust we may often meet in future, for even the course of duty may often lead you to Ispahan. But wherever you may go, remember that you have one sincere friend there in Abou 'Talib. May God and the Prophet ever protect you!"

The present which he had provided, consisted of a complete suit of the finest armour, of the old fabric of Damascus, made of the hardest steel inlaid and embossed with gold; and comprehended a scymetar and dagger of a water rarely to be equalled, with fire-arms the manufacture of the most cunning Frank artificers, and every implement or utensil useful to a soldier. These were pack-

ed in a pair of yekdauns,* and placed upon a powerful baggage mule, all ready for the march. But to one who like myself was enthusiastically fond of horses, the noblest and most gratifying part of this splendid present was an Arab courser, of the best blood to be found in the plains of Nedjeed, and whose limbs of perfect symmetry, full dark eye, and nostril of flame, bespoke his high descent. It was a steed that kings might have envied ; and kings but seldom bestow upon their greatest favourites so magnificent a gift as the generous Abou Talib now lavished upon me. But this was not the whole of his munificence. It was not till long afterwards that I thought of examining the acknowledgment which he had given me for my money. I have never been remarkable for attention to my pecuniary concerns, and this paper had lain neglected, almost forgotten, in an old trunk, when stumbling upon it by chance one day, I recollected the charge with which my friend had given it to me :—the time for which he had requested it might remain unopened had long elapsed, and I now broke the seal and examined its contents.

It was a document entitling to me, in the most formal manner, to claim either from him or from his heirs, a sum of infinitely greater magnitude than that which I had placed in his hands. The envelope contained these words :—

“Be not surprised, my dear Ismael, at finding the enclosed acknowledgment somewhat different from that which you anticipated. The sum I have specified as your deposit in my hands will be yours at my death, and may be yours at any previous period when you may require or wish to claim it. May your life be long and your prosperity ever increase !”

May every true believer possess as noble, as honourable, as generous a friend at his need, as Meerza Abou Talib was to me ! But in a long and varied pilgrimage through life, I have never met with his like !

* Travelling trunks.

CHAPTER XVII.

AN UNEXPECTED RENCONTRE.

THE toils and anxiety of my journey drew to a close, and the gilded domes and minarets of Mushed glittered in my view, before the freshness and verdure of spring had given place to the arid heats of summer. Many were the sweet and bitter thoughts that crowded on me, as the scene of so much happiness and so much misery once more greeted my sight. There were feelings and associations connected with this venerable place, which endeared it to me in spite of all I had suffered there; and my heart beat with an unaccountable feeling of delight as I now entered its walls.

No sooner had I disposed of my charge according to instructions, and established myself in comfortable quarters, than I hastened, as every good Sheah is in duty bound, to offer up my prayers and thanksgivings at the holy shrine for the happy termination of my journey.

After quitting the Durgah, as I was passing through the square in front of the great mosque towards the Bazaar, my ears were struck with the cry of "Yahooodee! Yahooodee! a Jew! a cursed Jew! stone him! kill the accursed dog!"—accompanied with much noise and plentiful abuse. The Jew, probably, was wise enough to take the hint and disappear, for the cries soon ceased and the ferment subsided. But the recollection of former scenes was in my mind, and my old adventure, so near the same spot, with the terrible fate of the unhappy Yacoob Yahooodee, was brought forcibly to my remembrance by the circumstance. "Poor wretch!" exclaimed I mentally—"and his grateful generous brother! I wonder if he yet lives—if he still resides in this city." Emotions of lively kindness rose in my mind as these thoughts passed through it, and I resolved that very hour to seek his dwelling.

The spot where it had stood was found without difficulty, but the miserable hovel was there no longer—a heap of ruined walls was all that remained of it. It was a bad omen; but I did not abandon the search, and advanced

farther into the Jewish Muhuleh* than I had ever done before, in quest of some one who might give me the information I required. Some children at play were the first living things I saw ; and upon the alarm they gave, an ill-looking man came forth, who, eyeing me suspiciously, requested to learn my commands. He affected utter ignorance on the subject of my inquiries, and declared that he knew no person in the muhuleh such as I described Abisham to be. Several other persons came up while we were talking, and listened to what was passing ; among the rest, an old woman, who, after having heard some sentences, began to consider me attentively—"And what can a young Persian officer, as your dress and air proclaim you to be, require with a miserable Jew, who has long since breathed his last in a distant land?" said she, after a while.—"Abisham dead?" exclaimed I, struck with surprise and sorrow at her words,—“is it then so?—am I too late?—what then has become of his family?—where are the children of his brother Yacoob?”—"And who may you be that put these questions?" repeated she, impatiently : "what know you of Abisham or his family?"—"What do I know?" rejoined I,—“if you know aught of Abisham, you must have heard of his brother's unfortunate fate. But stay ; perhaps you may recognize this signet,” added I, recollecting and producing the emerald ring given me by Abisham, which I constantly carried as a talisman about my person ; “if you do, it will explain to you that I can mean him no harm by these inquiries.”

The old woman started and threw herself at my feet when she saw the ring. “I know it, I know it well,” cried she ; “it is the signet of my master's house, and now do I remember him who bears it :—yes, my Lord, I recollect your features well, although they have changed from those of youth to manhood since that terrible day !”

“This is a friend,” said she, turning to the bystanders, who were gazing in doubtful wonder :—“there is nothing now to dread, and I will instantly take him to my master. Alas ! noble sir, Abisham the Jew still lives, though his days, even his hours, are numbered. But it will gladden

* Quarter, division.

his soul to see you, for often has he talked of you, and breathed many an earnest wish that he might see you once more before he should be gathered to his fathers."

A wonderful change was to be seen in the conduct of the spectators ; they bowed themselves with profound respect, and made room for me as the old woman led the way to the dwelling of her master. It was a miserable tenement, patched up among some ruins in the centre of this once populous quarter : no small pains had been taken to deprive it of a habitable look, and in order to arrive at it, we had to traverse some very narrow and offensive passages.

I found the unfortunate Abisham stretched upon his couch, in a condition that too plainly declared how near he was to the end of his earthly career. His cheeks were hollow and wan ; and his sunken lustreless eye wandered around in vacancy. As we approached, the old woman addressed him in a language of which nothing was intelligible to me except my own name, which she pronounced as she presented me to the dying man. A slight flush overspread his cheek, and a gleam of intelligence lighted up his eye, as it rested on my features with a glance of recognition. " My lord Ismael ! can it be ? " said he after a pause, with a hollow and sepulchral voice ;—" the God of my fathers has heard my prayer, and sent the only man of all his nation who may soften for me the bitterness of death. I am dying, noble Ismael ;—bethink you on your former goodness to a poor Jew, recollect your benevolent promises, and by confirming them relieve the mind of a man who will soon have done with this world. Remember the orphans whom you vowed to protect, and who will now become totally bereaved ; promise that you will not abandon them !"—I was greatly affected by this scene : the charge which the unhappy man required me to accept was a serious one ; but how could I refuse it ?—I did remember my former promise ; I remembered, too, his confiding reliance in my humanity, and how little it had been in my power to show myself worthy of it : honour as well as inclination prompted me to make some return, while all the better feelings of my nature urged me to soothe the last moments of a dying man. I swore to him solemnly,

that so far as my power might extend, his poor orphans should receive from me protection and support. That oath was no empty form, for in my own heart I vowed to keep it, in spirit and in letter, so long as life remained. The energy with which this promise was given was a cordial to the dying Abisham, which for a time revived his fleeting spirits. He spoke to me of the changes and misfortunes to which he had been subjected since he last had seen me, and communicated the views he had entertained for the future provision of his orphan nephews. I remained conversing with him for a long time, and left him more cheerful and composed than he had been for many weeks.

The sum of Abisham's story was as follows. The enmity of Meerza Jaffier did not cease with the death of his brother Yacoob. The Meerza was aware that the debt he owed to the deceased might still be claimed by his heirs, and resolved to leave no means untried to rid himself of this incumbrance, if it should cost the destruction of the whole family. In fact the Moollahs and Ahons* had taken the interference they had already met with in this affair so ill, that the Meerza found it easy to exasperate them to any extent he pleased; and they resolved to make sure of their victims as soon as the obstacles which held them in check should be removed. A course of determined persecution was commenced; and though for awhile the effects of this were warded off by means of large bribes, and an attempt was subsequently made on the part of the Jews to obtain the protection of a high authority, it was all in vain, and nothing remained but to seek for safety to life and property in flight. This, however, the health of Abisham was unequal to, and recourse was therefore had to concealment of the strictest nature. A retreat was prepared among certain extensive ruins in the Muhuleh, to which the persecuted family retired, while it was industriously given out that they had fled to their friends at Herat. A party of the Moollahs, their oppressors, accompanied by several officers of government, entered the Muhuleh to inquire into the truth of the report; they were baffled in their search, and vented their anger

* Ahon is another term for Moollah,

on the deserted walls, which were reduced to heaps of ruins.

Since that time, Abisham, with his nephews and two or three servants, of whom the old woman was the principal, had lived almost totally immured in this wretched retreat, till ill health and chagrin had reduced him to the brink of the grave. His misery was increased by an acute sense of the unprotected state in which he was about to leave his little orphans. "It is not the means of support that they will require," said he; "there is enough even in this city, in spite of all our losses, to give them a comfortable subsistence; and in other places there are still larger resources which will belong to them;—but who is there that can be intrusted with the substance of orphans? Though faith be better kept among us than among many a people less oppressed than we are, the temptation might prove too great for any of my kindred. One there is, indeed, but he is far distant: his years are many too—alas, it is impossible! On you alone, my Lord, must the poor Jew rely for justice and protection for his children; and so may the God of your fathers support you in misfortune, and sooth your dying hour, as you perform the promise which has this day shed its consolation over mine!"

Thanks be to Allah! I can say that this has been done. I have performed my duty to these orphans, and their father's spirit may rest in peace. While I saw them advance in beauty and in talents as in years, it was to me a pleasure greater than I can describe, to add to their comforts and promote their interests. And amply have I been repaid for all I ever did, for to me they have been always affectionate and grateful; and the darker hours of after-life were often cheered by a glow of comfort and consolation, from reflecting that whatever might have been my follies or my faults to others, I had at least performed the promise which I made to Abisham the Jew.

Nothing worth relating had occurred for some time after my arrival in Mushed, when strolling idly one afternoon by the Oosbeck caravanserai, and amusing myself with watching the crowds of people who frequented this great depot, my attention was arrested by an exclamation of distress at no great distance, accompanied by some words in

a female voice, and in the Tekeh language. They were uttered by a young woman in the Toorkoman dress, who, it appeared, in turning down a narrow lane close by, with a small tray of provisions in her hands, had been jostled by a surly porter, so rudely as to cause her to drop her burden. An emotion of compassion for her distress, together with a certain kindly feeling which always stirred within me at the sight of the Toorkoman garb, led me to go and inquire what ailed her. But I had no sooner begun to speak, than the girl started back and stood gazing at me with a countenance full of doubt and amazement. "Holy Prophet!" said she at last, regardless of my questions,—“is it possible?—am I mad or dreaming?—or is it the spirit of Ismael that stands before me?” I was startled in my turn, not less by the sound of her voice than by her exclamations; and replied with a surprise little inferior to her own, “Yes, child! you are not mistaken; my name, no doubt, is Ismael, and though I cannot recollect yours, the sound of your voice as well as your language is familiar to me; for I also have lived in the Desert, and have not forgotten the language of its tribes.”

“Our language too!” exclaimed the girl with increased eagerness,—“there can be no mistake,—it must be himself, and yet, alive! and in Mushed too! Oh! holy Fatimah, what a blessing is this! Dearest mistress, you will live now,—all will be well again! Ah, my lord! you must come with me immediately, if you would hear of one who, once was very dear to you;—if you would see her alive, lose not a moment, but follow me.”—“Stay! hold! what mean you?” exclaimed I with equal earnestness: “of whom do you speak, and who are you that thus recall, in language and in look, the memory of my youthful days?”—“Oh! for the sake of all you best love, delay no longer!” interrupted the girl, losing sight of my impatient curiosity in her own eager anticipations: “we shall be late; I can stay no longer from my mistress: come, I entreat you come!”—“Your mistress! and who then is your mistress?” cried I, trembling with inexplicable forebodings.—“My mistress!” repeated the girl; “and know you not Sitarah, the little captive whom you gave to Shireen?—who should be my mistress but her?”

Although from the first moment of this interview I had felt a wild and thrilling fancy, which, like the presentiment of something strange and awful, flitted over my mind, and made me tremble while I almost anticipated the import of her tidings,—still, when at last she uttered them so plainly, they stunned me like the bursting of a thunderbolt. Shireen! my long lost, ever loved Shireen in Mushed! and in danger!—dying perhaps!—my head grew dizzy, and I could scarce articulate a word. “Lead on, lead on!” cried I, in a low voice scarcely intelligible: “lose not another moment!” and I followed her with hasty steps, as she glided swiftly before me to a cluster of miserable huts at no great distance.

She entered a small mud-walled court, and, running forward through a mean apartment into an inner chamber of still more wretched description, she pushed aside the ragged curtain which hung before a door, and addressing herself to a figure which lay extended upon a pallet in one corner of the room, exclaimed, “Good news, my dear mistress—I bring you tidings of joy! He is come! he is here! your misery is at an end; your own Ismael is here—he will protect us, you will recover, and we shall all be happy again!”

A piercing shriek from the couch was all the reply; but it froze my very blood and fixed every faculty with painful intensity upon the scene before me. I did not gaze thus long; my heart would have spoken had my straining eyes even failed to discover the truth. On a squalid couch, surrounded with misery and poverty in all its forms, pale, emaciated, and dying as it seemed, lay the wasted form of my once blooming, lovely, and still fondly-loved Shireen! Heedless of every other object, in a tumult of remorse, apprehension, and joy, I threw myself upon the couch, and clasped her in my arms—but, alas! she was unconscious of my caresses—cold and motionless, she lay as one already dead—I thought she was indeed no more, and, overcome with grief and horror, fell insensible upon her body.

Recollection soon returned to me, and with it bitter anguish; the cries of poor Sitarah now restored me to my senses, and I revived to the keenest sense of the catas-

troupe which, as I believed, had taken place, and of which I upbraided myself as the cause. But it was long indeed before the skill of those about her could restore the exhausted Shireen to animation; and the most sanguine thought for a time that the spirit had fled for ever. Better hopes at length arose: some long heavy sighs burst from her breast, and, slowly opening her eyes, she gazed around with a bewildered look, as if in quest of something. Eager as I was to see the first evidences of reviving life, I had yet sufficient sense to comply with the request of the attendants, and to withdraw from the couch until Shireen should be better prepared to receive me.

"Where is he?" at last she uttered slowly—"what has become of him? Surely he was here! or was it a dream? Have I been asleep?—yes! it must have been a dream, for I thought he stood by my couch, and that Sitarah called him by his name, and said he came to make me happy again!—but then darkness fell upon me, and I saw no more! I am very weak!" added she after a pause—"I am worse, I think. Surely something has happened?—perhaps I am dying!—well, it is better so for me—I do not wish to live!—But, alas! my brother, that thy glorious day should be overcast so soon!"

"You are not dying, dear mistress," said Sitarah, still weeping and trembling at the effects of her imprudent zeal, and eager to repair her error. "Something has happened, indeed, but it is a joyful not a sorrowful event."

"Hush!" said an old woman, who had been active in her attentions to Shireen: "be quiet, or you will kill her outright. See you not that the breath flutters in her nostrils. uncertain whether to stay or to depart. Retire all of you, and, as you value her life, leave me alone with her." The air of authority with which she uttered this, was suited to the emergency, and had the proper effect: we felt she was right, and withdrew, leaving her only with the exhausted Shireen, who now lay quietly gazing upwards, as if awaiting the death which she believed so near.

I could not bear this horrid stillness:—life seemed ebbing away without an effort to arrest its flight. "Can nothing then be done!" cried I in agony to those around me; "are there no physicians to be had—no cordials to revive

her?" "Physicians there are, no doubt, and cordials too, for those who can purchase them," replied one; "but where shall miserable captives, who have been plundered of all they possessed, find the means of procuring them? This poor girl, whose fate seems to interest you so deeply, is dying from the effects of hardship and want; for we, who have scarce the means of subsistence, cannot afford her the nourishment or the remedies which her condition requires." Pierced to the soul by this cruel intelligence, I offered every thing I had about me, and implored that not a moment might be lost in getting all that might afford any hope of saving her life, or could increase her comforts. "How are we to obtain them?" replied the women,—“we are prisoners as well as strangers in Mushed, and are not permitted to quit this place; nor, even if we were, could we find what you require in the confusion of these extensive bazaars and endless multitude of houses.” They spoke the truth; I felt it:—there was no alternative but to tear myself from the spot, and fly in search of more effectual aid; nor did I rest until I had summoned all the physicians of greatest name, and crowded the miserable hovel with every convenience and comfort I could think of. In effecting this, a considerable time was spent in spite of my eager anxiety to be at the bedside of Shireen; but perhaps it was a fortunate delay, for on my return I found, that, somewhat revived by a cordial which had been administered, she had again questioned those about her regarding what had occurred. With most tender and commendable caution, the old woman had taken the opportunity to inform her by degrees, that what she had seen and heard was no dream, but a happy reality; that I had indeed been beside her, and had only left the house to procure her the assistance she so greatly required. Her agitation on hearing these tidings had been less violent, and her enfeebled frame seemed now more able to support the weight of joy which had overwhelmed her at first—she had become more composed, and was anxious to see me, to ascertain the truth by the evidence of her own senses. “You may now approach her,” said the old nurse, “but be cautious, as you value her life—speak but little—do not agitate her—remain not long. Joy, like many precious medicines, if

administered with prudence, soothes and benefits the patient ; but used with rashness or in excess, it becomes a fatal poison."

Pale and motionless as death itself, Shireen still lay extended on the couch ; but a ray of intelligence beamed in her eye, and fancy almost persuaded me that her cheek bore the first faint token of returning health. An increased degree of comfort was visible about her ; odours of healing virtue perfumed the apartment, and cordials of powerful efficacy stood ready for her use. Hope revived in my breast, as kneeling down beside her and gently clasping her fragile form in my arms, I kissed her pale lips, and breathed a prayer that Allah would have mercy and restore her to me ! " Ah ! dearest Ismael," said she, faintly returning my caress, " I shall now die in peace, if I must die, since Allah has granted me the blessing of seeing you once more ; and yet I could wish to live a little longer now—it is hard to part with you again, so soon, and for ever !" " Shireen, dearest Shireen ! do not speak thus, you will live now—for my sake you will live, and we shall never part again ! The merciful Allah would not have reunited us but to part us for ever at the moment of our meeting. But compose yourself ; you must be silent for the present : I will sit by your bed and watch you."—" Ah Ismael ! to see you there is a more powerful cordial than any drug that riches can produce. But I have suffered so much !—you know not what has happened—we all have suffered. Alas ! few of those whom you knew, survive to mourn their losses—and it is wonderful that I, the weakest of them all, have survived the total wreck of my family !—Poor Selim !"—" What of him, Shireen ?—in the name of Heaven, say not that he is dead !"—" No, oh no !—he lives as yet ; but how long he may be suffered to exist I cannot tell. I have not breath to tell you now ;—but he is a captive like myself—taken, wounded and overwhelmed by numbers, the last of his house—those about me can tell you all—I cannot :—but save him, dearest Ismael ! if you have any power, spare it not for him who saved your life and mine, at the risk of his own."—Her voice grew faint again, and she nearly relapsed into insensibility. The nurse once more interfered ; and a grave-

looking physician, who had been sitting in a corner unnoticed by me, issued his commands against any farther conversation.

This Hakeem commenced a brave discussion upon the causes of his patient's malady, its symptoms and possible consequences, explaining the nature of cold and hot sympathies, and introducing many learned observations upon the effect of planetary influences in human diseases. His harangue was lost upon me, but concluded by a hint conveyed in quaint and figurative, but sufficiently intelligible terms, that he expected a munificent recompense for the learning and skill he had displayed in behalf of his patient. I bade him be at ease upon that score, and apply the full powers of his mind to the recovery of his patient, who was once more reviving under the salutary influence of another cordial. I besought her to compose herself, and to divest her mind of all anxiety about her brother—"Leave him to my care," said I; "I will seek him out, and rely upon it his life shall be safe, even should my own be the sacrifice: think only of your own health, dearest Shireen, and remember, that if you be restored to us, by the blessing of Allah, all may yet be well." Strictly charging the nurse, who proved to be both skilful and trust-worthy, to prevent the entrance of every one except the physician, and never to quit her patient, I left the house to make inquiries about Selim.

I soon learned from the other Toerkoman prisoners, that during the late disturbances among the Desert tribes, which had embroiled the whole north of Khorasan, the branch of Tekes which occupied the desert west of Merve, had been very severely handled. Some aouls, they told me, had been totally destroyed; and among others, that which dwelt at the Chushmah Jemallee had been utterly swept away. Among the few prisoners that were taken in the desperate strife was Selim, overpowered by numbers, and sorely wounded, with one or two remaining members of his family; and he was, they said, at this very time confined, with others of his nation, in a small caravanserai near the palace—which, in consequence of its strength, had been converted for the time into a prison—

there to remain strictly guarded until the pleasure of Nader concerning them should be known.

I lost not a moment in going to this caravanserai ; but upon desiring permission to enter and see my friend, I was told that the orders regarding these prisoners were so precise, that no one could be allowed to approach them. I flew to the officer who had charge of the prison, and with whom I was slightly acquainted, but he gave me the same reply.—“ These prisoners,” said he, “ have been guilty of aggravated treason. His Highness is much exasperated against them, and has given the most unqualified orders that no one whatever shall have access to, or be permitted to communicate with them, either by word or letter.”—“ But he never would have included me in this prohibition,” said I. “ You know who I am ; I will answer for no ill consequence arising from the indulgence I require.” “ I know you well, Sir,” replied the officer, “ and I would willingly comply with your wishes ; but my orders are imperative—no one may see the prisoners.”—“ What !” replied I, with rising displeasure, “ you know me for a confidential servant of his Highness, for an officer high in his regard, and yet you refuse me permission only to see and converse with a Toorkoman captive ?”—“ I but obey my orders,” replied he ; “ besides, that captive is no insignificant person ; his courage and his influence have caused more serious loss, and given more trouble to the General’s troops, than they have experienced from any of the rebellious tribes. The anger of Nader is kindled ; and, if I should dare to speculate upon the intentions of my master, I should say that the death of all, and his more particularly, is certain.”—“ His death !” cried I ; “ the death of Selim fixed ! By the head of Nader himself, and by the holy Kaaba ! it cannot be ;—it must not, and it shall not be. Give way ! I must see him, and that immediately.” “ By your favour, but you must not,” replied the officer, firmly but respectfully ;—“ it may not be. I would willingly oblige you in any thing that is reasonable ; but neither for you, nor for any living man, will I disobey the orders of Nader. By the sword of Allee ! my head would sit but loosely on my shoulders were I to be so weak ; and you, Sir, might chance to lose a trifle of the favour you

presume so much upon, when you think it can license you to break the rules of him who bestowed it upon you."

Maddened with disappointment at meeting so stout and unlooked-for an opposition in a matter wherein my feelings were so deeply interested, I became furious and unreasonable; but the steady and temperate resistance of the officer at length brought me to my senses, and I was constrained to admit that he acted just as I should have thought myself bound to do in similar circumstances.

I then besought him to convey a simple message to his prisoner; but even this he scrupled to consent to. I was unwilling needlessly to explain the nature of my connexion with Selim; but in hopes of interesting his good nature in his prisoner's favour, even although he should persist in refusing to convey him either letter or message, I confided to him some of the circumstances of my early life, calculated to convince him that my business with Selim had no connexion with his political conduct. This was a more rational way of going to work. Satisfied with having brought me to reason, and proud of the steadiness with which he had maintained his point of duty, he suffered himself more readily to be touched with my narrative, and promised to show every kindness in his power to my friend. He then agreed to give him a slip of paper, open, and containing a few words, to which he should himself be privy; and assured me that every comfort and indulgence, compatible with strict confinement, should be afforded him. The paper contained only these words: "A trusty friend watches over the safety of Shireen, and will not neglect that of Selim. Let not his heart, therefore, fail him, nor let his spirits be cast down; for the sun of happiness may break through the clouds of misfortune when they are darkest, and an army will sometimes appear from a quarter whence not even a horseman was expected."

The officer farther pledged himself, that so long as the prisoners were left in his charge, not a man should be harmed, or even examined, without my receiving intimation; and that he would watch with peculiar care over the safety of my friend. With these assurances I was forced to be content, and to wait, with what patience I might, till the arrival of Nader should enable me to try the extent of

my influence with him, and obtain the life of Selim whatever it might cost.

A few days produced a very favourable change in the condition of Shireen. Acute mental suffering, with extreme bodily fatigue, aggravated by want and misery, had reduced her to the state in which I found her, and which probably, in a few hours more, would have terminated her existence. When one principal source of anxiety was removed by the prospect I held out of her brother's ultimate safety—when a hope of better times dawned upon her through the chaos of misery which had surrounded her for so long—and when the buoyancy of youth, and the strength of a good constitution thus gained scope to act, health gradually re-animated her exhausted frame, and our fears for her life were removed. Before a week had elapsed, Shireen and the females attached to her were removed through my influence into more suitable lodgings, and surrounded with every comfort. As her strength returned, and the danger of agitating her by conversation abated, I entreated her to inform me of all that occurred, from the moment of my quitting her in so critical a situation, until that when I chanced to be recognized by her slave, and became the fortunate instrument of preserving her life. I had already gathered a good deal from other quarters, but as her information comprehended the greater part of all I collected on the subject, I shall put the whole together, and give it in the shape of a continuous narrative, and chiefly in her own words.

CHAPTER XVIII.

STORY OF SHIREEN.

“ON that terrible day when we met for the last time near the pleasant Chushmah Jemallee,—a day which surely neither of us can ever forget,—my spirits, which, as you may recollect, had been low for many days, were even more depressed than usual. I remember, Ismael, that you rallied me upon it; but soothed me and caressed me when you saw that I could not repress my tears. On reaching the tents after parting with you, I was met by

Kawleh, the Khanum's old slave, who always hated me,—with an ominous scowl, in which my quickened apprehension detected a glance of malignant triumph. 'Welcome home, young woman,' said she; your place has been void;* my mistress has inquired for you.' Conscience-stricken as I was already, her words completed my alarm; and it was in no degree diminished by the storm which I saw lowering on the Khanum's brow. 'How now, Shireen!' she began; 'how come you thus to neglect your duty,—the business of the family? Whence do you come? what have you been about?' Confounded and distressed by questions so unseasonable and perplexing, as well as by the penetrating look with which they were accompanied, I could give no satisfactory reply; but muttering some incoherent excuse, I attempted to pass onward to my own part of the tent. But I was not permitted to escape thus. 'Stay, girl!' said the Khanum, in a stern voice; 'stay, and answer me more distinctly—Where have you been? who was your companion? and what have you been about? There are strange reports regarding you, young woman!' added she, after a pause; 'and I intend, before we part, to know what truth may be in them!'—I tried to look her in the face, and to ask in the tone of innocence, what these reports might be? and what reason she could have for doubting my discretion; but I could not do it: my limbs trembled under me; my tongue refused its office; and my eye quailed under her stern and searching gaze. Oh, Ismael! how dreadful is the weight of guilt upon the soul!—how terrible the consciousness of a secret crime! The burden of mine bowed me to the earth! The Khanum saw my confusion, and pursued her advantage.. 'What! dumb? am I to conclude that all is true, then? Hah! girl! have you then sunk so low? Must I name the miscreant? But thy father will soon be here, and we shall see how the Kuzzilbash dog—ay, and his meek Shireen—will endure his fury!'

"I heard no more—my worst fears seemed now to be

* That is—you have been missed, a complimentary expression used here in derision.

realized ; the terrible thought of my father's wrath, and of the bloody revenge he would take upon you, dear Ismael, overpowered me. My head reeled, and I fell deprived of sense to the ground, at the feet of the Khanum. This unlucky swoon led to the full disclosure of my shame. Hitherto, it seems, they only knew of our attachment ;— they had detected our secret intercourse, but not its full extent. The measures which they, not very delicately, employed to restore me to life, exposed the fatal lengths to which it had been carried.

“What passed while I continued thus insensible I know not ; the first sound I heard was the voice of Selim endeavouring to persuade his mother to control the loudness of her indignation.—‘It cannot be concealed,’ did he say, ‘if you are so violent. Can you think, mother, that I feel the disgrace which has fallen upon us less than you do?—but is it to be remedied by publishing it to the whole camp? Will my father thank you for doing so? I ask you, would my father be pleased to hear that the shame which he would wish to be buried in the bowels of the earth, has been declared to all the world by the rash violence of his own wife’s tongue?’—‘Your father!’ repeated she with fury ; ‘no fear but your father shall know the whole story ;—a fine opinion it will give him of his favourite daughter!—the darling whom he has thought fit to prefer even to the children of me, his lawful wife! But he is well served for his folly ; and I too am fitly rewarded for my weakness, in agreeing to regard her like my own, as I did.’

“With that, mother, I shall not interfere ; but as the representative of my father in his absence, I call upon you to be discreet, as he would have you be. Let Shireen be closely confined until his arrival ; be silent to the world ; caution Kawleh, who seems as yet to be the only person aware of the matter, against uttering a single word that may excite suspicion, and let nothing more be done until he returns.’—‘Well, my son, you may be right but how can any one be quiet when such doings are carried on before our very faces? And what is to become of that vile Kuzzilbash? I insist upon his being secured,—I will not be disappointed of my revenge on him : however weakly the Khan may act with regard to his daughter, he surely will wreak his vengeance on her betrayer.’

“Mother! the honour of Omer Khan is in his own keeping; and woe betide him or her who shall assert that he requires either aid or advice in protecting it from insult! Leave Ismael to me: he has gone to some distance from the camp to-day, and may not return till late; when he comes I shall know how to act. But we must be prudent: his attachment to Shireen was notorious; and should any measure of severity be exercised towards him while she appears to be under displeasure, conclusions discreditable to the family would undoubtedly be drawn. Be calm then, mother, and allow me to converse with this unhappy girl alone.’

“Trembling with terror, I had shrunk from the violence of the Khanum, and was pressing close to Selim for protection as he uttered the last words; and although scarce able to move, I gladly exerted my failing limbs to drag me from the presence of his mother, as he led me to my own quarter of the tent, where, quite exhausted with agitation, I sank upon the couch in utter, hopeless misery.

“‘Well may you weep! well may you tremble!’ said Selim, after a pause; ‘but neither tears nor terror can remove the disgrace your guilt has brought upon us all, nor avert the consequences of your crime. If female modesty, which you have outraged; if the honour of your family, which your conduct has so foully tarnished—if the thoughts of the anguish you were preparing for a brother who loved you so well, were not motives strong enough to keep you in the path of innocence and virtue, how could you have disregarded the certain, the terrible wrath of your father, or forget the bloody tragedy which must surely ensue upon a discovery not to be avoided!’

“Bitter as were my brother’s words, I sought not to interrupt him; but throwing myself at his feet I clung to him in despair, and at last, when the heavy sobe that shook my frame would let me, I exclaimed, ‘Hear me, Selim, while I have life and strength to utter it!—hear me, brother, for the last time, if it must be so—I acknowledge all my guilt—nor does the misery I now endure require the aggravation of your bitter upbraidings—but, thank God! it will soon have an end, and the shame which I have brought upon you, will pass away with my wretched life—

for I am dying, Selim ! I feel that it is so—and if your mother will but wait a little while, the miserable creature whom she has spurned, will cease to live, without the need of murder, and her indignation, her hatred will be quenched by my death.—But, while I can, let me do justice to the innocent :—Ismael is not to blame !—no, my brother, though it be true that he is the author of my present unhappy situation, I take Heaven to witness that he never sought to seduce me. You know, dear Selim, how Ismael and I were brought up together—no brother and sister could have enjoyed more unrestrained liberty of intercourse ; for during our infant years he was as a child of the family.—You know how many acts of kindness combined with his noble and amiable qualities to make me love him, spite of the difference of our stations ;—you know, too, how sternly our innocent and open intimacy was broken off. I will not attempt to justify the secret intercourse which we indulged in, when we dared no longer to meet in public ; but I can answer for both, that neither entertained a thought of the fatal consequences which followed. We were indeed too simple and ignorant to do so. But to these unfortunate circumstances—to the concealment which was thus forced upon us, is to be attributed our fall.—Is our guilt, then, so very heinous, Selim ? Oh, I am sure you cannot think so. But if a sacrifice must be made, let it be her who has no wish to survive her shame, and not that Ismael who has shed his blood for Selim—who has so long served his father with unswerving fidelity.’

“ ‘ I must believe you, Shireen. I do not think the frank and noble nature of Ismael could have conceived so black a treachery, even had he overlooked the consequences inevitable on detection, and forgot the ruin it must necessarily bring on your head, as well as on his own ;—he loved you too well for that. Nor need you remind me of his devotion to your brother ; the proofs of it can never be effaced from his memory. Be comforted : he shall be saved, if either my skill or influence can effect it ; but we must be speedy : should my father return and find him here, no living thing could stop the torrent of his wrath.’—‘ Oh, yes ! dearest Selim ; you must be speedy indeed ;—let him instantly fly—let not an hour be lost.

Oh, were he once safe, with what good will could I lie down and die; and would to God that it could be before my father's return!—for, oh! my brother, I shrink from the thought of his fury!—I would not—I would not perish by his hand!—that would be too dreadful.'

"No, my poor Shireen! by the mercy of Allah, you shall not die!" said Selim, with a troubled voice, for his heart was melted by my misery. 'I trust in the Almighty you will live; and for your father's anger, trust me, I shall find means to turn it aside: you shall not feel it!—why should he break a heart already wounded? No! have courage my dear sister, you shall yet see better days—it were sad, indeed, if your sweet and lovely morning were to be so soon overcast for ever. But I must leave you now—remain here in peace, for no one shall dare to harm you. I go to provide for the safety of the unfortunate and imprudent Ismael.'

"I have not related to you half of all that passed at this long and painful interview, my dear Ismael; nor is it possible for me to describe to you the misery which I suffered, and which forced tears even from the eyes of Selim. He left me relieved from the first gush of despair, but plunged in a degree of anxiety for your safety, which was, I think, more insufferable than the worst certainty could have been. The consequences to me were only those which might have been anticipated; racking pains throughout my whole frame, accompanied with deadly sickness, and fits of burning heat and shuddering cold, announced that the hopes of a mother were to be prematurely blasted. The hopes, did I say? Alas! I had no hopes. How could I wish my child to inherit the shame and misery which were all I could bequeath it? I prayed that neither might survive. Your child, Ismael, never saw the light; and for many days its wretched mother lay between life and death, like a thing neither fit for earth nor heaven!—But Selim did not abandon me. When he parted with you, he brought me the grateful tidings of your escape; and I could pray to Allah for blessings on your path,—though even with death so near in view, my heart swelled with a bitter pang, at the thought that I should never see you more. Oh, Ismael! it was a dreadful time!—Except my brother, there were none to soothe me—none that cared for me; and

many were about me, that hoped I never might recover. But Selim did not suffer these to come nigh; he gave me in charge of two women from among the household, on whose kindness he could depend; and thus did matters continue until my father returned.

"It was on the evening of the fourth day after the events I have related, that shouts and distant tumult announced the Khan's return. The cold sweat stood upon my brow, and my heart died within me as I heard it; for I knew that my worst trial was at hand, and pale and motionless I lay awaiting it. The trampling and neighing of horses, the bustle and buzz of voices approached. I recognized those of several persons whom I knew; and soon the loud and cheerful accents of my father thrilled to my heart, as he replied to the congratulations of his family, who now poured out to meet him. He retired to his tent; and its thin walls did not prevent me from distinguishing the voices of my mother, and Selim, in earnest conversation with him. Once or twice I thought they swelled into a louder key; and a fresh shudder of terror came over me, as I believed my hour was come, and tried to prepare myself for the awful storm about to burst upon me. But the voices died away by degrees;—silence ensued in the tent, the hum and buzz of the camp alone was heard, and I continued unmolested and alone.

"For three days after this I neither saw Selim nor my father. On the morning of the fourth, when the violence of my alarm had a little subsided, and I was lying, worn out and still struggling for life, upon my solitary couch, I heard the sound of footsteps. Lifting my languid eyes, they fell upon my father, who, led by Selim, was slowly approaching me. Terror, no less than weakness, deprived me of power to utter the faintest cry, and, clasping my hands instinctively, I lay awaiting my doom. But a glance at the countenance of Selim reassured me; for it smiled on me with an expression of benevolence not unmingled with apprehension, as he said, 'Shireen, your father is come to bestow upon you his forgiveness; receive it with the humility and thankfulness which is due to him.'

"The flush of anger that rose to my father's weather-beaten and agitated brow, as he entered the tent, gave way

to a gaze of pity and alarm, when he turned his eyes upon my pale and almost lifeless figure. In no small agitation he turned to Selim: 'How is this?' said he, 'is she in truth so ill?—good God! she is dying!—Shireen, my poor girl! have no fears for your father;—I forgive you; I forgive you heartily—only try to recover. Curses on the wretches! they have frightened her to death,' muttered he, observing the terror which his kindness could not at once subdue; 'and double curses on the villain who has reduced her to this dreadful plight!'

" 'Blessings be upon you, my father!' said I, faintly, 'for your unmerited kindness to a wretch like me;—it will smooth my path to the grave; for I could not have died in peace with your curse upon me. But oh! my father, if you would indeed give ease to a broken heart, take that curse also from one who is less guilty than I;—let not your malediction light upon the orphan whom you reared and protected so long—who would have shed his blood like water to do you good.'

" The angry flush again returned, and Selim's countenance became clouded with anxiety. 'Now, by the head of the Prophet! name not the miscreant! speak not of him, if you be wise,' cried the Khan in a terrible voice: 'Well is it for him that my son, in his prudence, took measures to secure him from my vengeance;—his blood had else been surely on my hand! I am not sorry to have avoided that; but name not a traitor, who has betrayed the hand that fed him!'

" 'My father,' replied I calmly, for my terror had begun to abate; 'the world will soon be nothing to me; and what would it avail me to die with a lie in my mouth? The youth whom you would lead with your curse, however inconsiderate, however worthy he may be of blame, was never either treacherous or ungrateful:—he loved you as a father, and would have given his life to repair the evil which arose from our mutual folly and inexperience, not from his premeditated guilt. Bethink you, my father, of the many proofs you have seen of Ismael's devotion to your family; be persuaded that he never willingly wronged you; and do not add to the misery of your dying daughter, by a malediction which, though aimed at him, would surely light on her head!'

"Well, well, my daughter, be at peace! wonder not that a Pekeh chief should find it hard to forgive the destroyer of his child. Had he not been a fool!—but why think of that?—it is too late now. By the head of my father! the youth was brave; and, in spite of all that has passed, may I never see the gates of Paradise if I do not regret his loss! Selim, you did well; you acted wisely: I am a hasty fool, and, had it not been for you, I might have done that of which I should have repented!—Let this poor girl be kindly cared for. God bless you, my daughter! you must live for the sake of your father, who freely forgives you for all the distress he has suffered on your account!"

"Thus passed the interview which I dreaded so much. I need not tell you, that to the kind zeal of Selim alone I was indebted for the conciliatory character it had assumed; for at first the fury of the Khan had been almost unmanageable.

"When the approach of his party to the camp was announced, Selim took care to be among the first to meet him; and he accompanied his father in close attendance to the tents. The Khanum, with the women of the family, met him, as usual, at the entrance; but a purposely assumed constraint in the manner of the former was not long in attracting his attention. 'What is the matter, Khanum?' said he: 'what cloud is lowering on your brow?—And you too, Kawleh, you look gloomy and disconcerted: what means all this? has any thing unlucky happened?—Where is Shireen?' continued he, after a moment's pause, in which he cast his eyes around the circle: 'she was not used to be the last to welcome her father! what has become of her?'—'Shireen is sick!' was the Khanum's brief reply.—'Sick!—what? how?—what ails her?—when was she taken ill?—where is she?'—'When my lord shall be alone,' replied the Khanum, mysteriously, 'he shall learn all!' and she led the way to the inner tent, followed only by Selim and old Kawleh.

"'It grieves me, Khan, to greet you with heavy tidings,' began the lady; 'but strange and most unfortunate events have come to light during your absence from camp. You may, perhaps, miss another of the family, who, till now,

was ever among the first to congratulate you on your safe return.'—'Why hast thou become a bird of bad omen, to meet me thus on my return with bodings of evil?' said the Khan, impatiently. 'Speak out at once! say, what is the matter?—miss another of the family?'—muttered he slowly, after another scrutinizing glance around.—'It is true—I do miss one—where is Ismael? why is he not here?—Hah!—surely!—' He stopped and bent his eyes upon his son, and then upon the Khanum, with an expression of kindling fury, so dark and fearful, that his wife quailed beneath it, and shrank from the task she had so readily undertaken. 'My father, I entreat you to be calm!' said Selim, who now stood forward and addressed him: 'control your feelings;—if you would preserve that character for wisdom and prudence which has placed you so high among your people, exert them now, for our tidings are but too well calculated to excite your wrath.' The gesture of impatience which the Khan could not repress, augured but ill for his powers of self-control; but the words of his son had produced their effect, and he restrained his vehemence by a strong and painful effort.—'Say on, my son, and fear me not—I am calm—be thy tidings what they may, I shall curb my feelings—only tell me what has happened—torment me no longer with suspense.'

"Your daughter!" said Selim, with anxious solemnity, 'the penetration of my father has not been deceived; the strong, the culpable attachment.'—'Hah! sayest thou?' interrupted the Khan, stamping on the ground with kindling eyes, 'Stafer-ullah! is it true then?—but no, no!—it cannot be!—the slave could never dare!—the vile Kuzzilbash dog!—But go on, go on—tell me all!—' My father, there is little more to say, nor dare I enlarge on the subject while you are thus—it is indeed as you suspect,—Shireen has fallen, and Ismael is the wretched cause!—'Great God! what news is this?—how has this dust fallen upon my head!' exclaimed the Khan after a short pause, for he seemed stunned by the certainty of the evil which till then he had only dreaded.—'But where are they, my son?' continued he, rousing himself—'where is the miscreant! where is the vile polluted girl?—Daughter!—no daughter of mine; nor shall our shame continue for an

hour by suffering her to live that time! Where are they confined? let me see them instantly!

“ ‘Stop, my father!’ said Selim, seizing his arm as he trembled with rage—you have promised to be calm; you must not see them now.’—‘Must not! who shall prevent me, hah!—off, weak boy! unhand me! let me go! By Allah! you are worse than they!—A son of mine to tell me of his sister’s shame, with that tranquil face, and then to seek to hold me from her villanous betrayer! Had you come before me with your hands and dagger dyed with their blood, I might have pardoned your anticipating my vengeance; but that you should submit to the affront yourself, and even seek to control *my* wrath!—away! begone! lest you also feel its sharpness!’—and the sword was half drawn in his hand. ‘Then be it so!’ calmly but firmly said Selim, ‘for only over my body shall you approach your wretched daughter, who, already stricken to the earth, will not long survive to excite your fury.’

“The steady but respectful bearing of his son restored the father somewhat to himself. The sword fell back into its scabbard, and stepping back a pace, he raised his hand to his flushed brow, and gazed for some moments as if rallying his scattered thoughts. ‘My father,’ continued Selim after a pause, ‘young as I am, you have honoured me with your confidence, and been pleased to approve of my judgment in matters of no small moment:—think you that the honour of my family is a light thing in my eyes? Have I ever shown myself a coward, that you should think I fear to defend it, or to vindicate its purity by blood if required?—or do you imagine that this honour is to be protected by proclaiming with clamour, and by deeds of violence, the shame that has fallen upon us, and which hitherto I have carefully concealed?—Recollect yourself—be calm—be a man.’

“ ‘You are right, my son,’ said the father, after some moments of reflection;—‘we shall be cautious—I will smother the rage which devours me, though I should choke in the struggle:—our revenge shall be secret and silent; but not the less certain, not the less deadly. But where are they, Selim? are they confined securely?—we must not be noisy, but we cannot be too speedy!’ and his

hand grasped the hilt of his dagger, as if to loosen it for the blow, while he looked eagerly at his son to lead the way. But Selim once more laid his hand upon his father's arm : — ' Whom would you slay, my father ? — your wretched daughter ? — Alas ! suffering and terror have bowed her to the earth — already almost is she as you would have her be — even now she has but a few hours to live — your dagger is not required — nor, were you to see her sweet, pale face, as it now lies with the seal of Azrael on every feature, could you endure to hasten his approach.' — The face of the Khan softened for a space, but soon his eye flashed fire again ; ' But the miscreant who has brought her to this ? ' asked he, ' what has become of him ? where have you confined him ? what tortures are equal to his crime ? ' — ' The wretched Ismael endures worse tortures than your knives or your whips could inflict,' replied Selim ; ' for, however blameable may have been his imprudence, he never dreamt of its lamentable consequences. Would you slay the creature whose life was preserved by yourself ? whom you have nourished and loved ? whose blood has been lavished in your service, and to whom your own son has been indebted for his life ? But you are spared the perpetration of a deed which would blacken your name, and fill your soul hereafter with remorse. Ismael is no longer here.' — ' Not here ! — what has become of him ? where is he ? has he fled ? why is he not pursued ? has the dastard fled from the punishment which he knew would follow his crimes ? '

“ ‘ Ismael has fled, my father, it is true ; but he is no dastard : freely would he have given his life to redeem the misery he has caused, nor would he have quitted the camp, but at my earnest desire, — I might say command.' — The Khan stood for a moment aghast with astonishment. ' Thy command, traitor ! ' cried he in a voice of thunder — ' what devil hath besotted thee to cheat me of my vengeance thus ? — but it shall be wreaked upon thy own head ! ' Again the hand was on the dagger-hilt, and again the calm and noble demeanour of his son brought the Khan to himself. ' Tell me,' cried he after a pause ; ' tell me, hath God stricken thee with madness ? or how is it that thou hast conspired to drive me distracted ? Thou

aid mine enemy to fly ! Thou seek to preserve the destroyer of thy sister ! the dishonourer of thy family ! By the holy Caabah ! it is incredible—it must be a dream : I cannot be awake !

“ ‘ Father,’ replied Selim, ‘ when you left the camp, you deemed me worthy to fill your place ; and, however imperfectly I may have done so, I acted as my poor judgment led me to think was best. We all observed the singular attachment which grew up between the boy Ismael and the girl Shireen ; nor did a devotion, which might well exist in the heart of a favoured servant for the daughter of his patron, excite any serious suspicions in the minds of the family. Whatever more presumptuous thought might arise at any time in young Ismael’s breast, you yourself checked on more than one occasion ; nor did I fail to add such hints as might avail towards that end. But the torrent from the mountains may as easily be arrested as the course of youthful affection ! Prohibited from open intercourse, Shireen and Ismael met in private, and the consequences you already know. But, however guilty in act, their hearts were free from intended wrong. Oh ! never did the deep contrition and despair which bowed these two unfortunate creatures to the ground, form a cloak for heartlessness and vice ! Had you, my father, beheld the poor girl trembling and sinking under the intemperate violence of my mother and old Kawleh, or witnessed the distraction of Ismael, the frank confession of his guilt, and his noble offer of himself to glut the vengeance of the offended family, if that could in any degree atone for his guilt, or benefit the victim of his thoughtlessness, even your heart would have been melted, and you would have done as I did—rescued the dying girl from her tormentors, and risked your life to save the companion of your youth, the friend who had spilled his blood to save yours, from a severe even if it were a merited fate. I pledged my life for the safety of Shireen ; I conjured Ismael to fly, and supplied him with the means. And now, father, I am in your hands : if I have done amiss let the punishment fall upon my head—I will not shrink from it.’

“ Thus did my noble and warm-hearted brother exert himself to allay the storm which impended over me, and

to pacify his furious father ; whose rage, though it abated in open violence, still boiled in his bosom, and left him sullen, moody, and unsatisfied. Long did Selim continue to soothe and argue by turns ; for though the Khan could not deny, that to conceal the mischief which had happened, was the best way to protect the honour of his family, he was scarcely able to control his feelings, so as to put this principle in practice : nor was it without extreme difficulty that he was prevented from visiting me, until his anger had given way to a moody sadness, on which Selim hoped my feeble and exhausted condition might work a favourable effect. But several days elapsed before this was the case ; and during all that time he never left his father's side. It was then that by representing the remorse which he must feel, if I should die without his forgiveness, and by painting to him the wretchedness I had suffered already, he prevailed on him to visit me with the intention of speaking pardon and peace to my soul. How well he succeeded in that benevolent intent, you have already heard.

“ Thus terminated the immediate consequences of our unfortunate misconduct. When my mind was relieved from the terror of my father's wrath, and when I felt the eye of kindness once more beaming on me, I began to recover ; and after some weeks my bodily health was entirely restored.

“ But there were other ills, of which the remedy was not so simple. The pain I should have felt at the thought that we were never to meet again, was swallowed up for the time in the agony of our stormy parting and its fearful consequences. But as the effect of these wore away, the dismal void which you had left, Ismael, began to be felt, and I had time to brood over my irreparable loss. A woman's heart, which loves as faithfully as mine did, when once it loses the object of its adoration, sustains a withering blight of which it never can recover. I bore my wretchedness as best I could, in silence ; for whom, besides myself, had I to blame ? I applied myself to my domestic duties with a zeal which gained me the approbation even of the Khanum, but for which I could claim no merit ; for I worked rather to distract my thoughts, than

from any sense of duty. All was dark and gloomy to me, and day after day succeeded each other in cheerless, unpitied sorrow. The only one who felt for me was Selim ; he knew what was passing in my heart—he comprehended my silent misery and pitied me while approving the efforts which I made to conceal it.

“ ‘ You are right, my sister,’ would he say—‘ give idle tongues no cause to talk ;—time will heal your wounds, and who can read the future ?—God is great !—who can tell what may yet be in store for you ? ’ ”

CHAPTER XIX.

STORY OF SHIREEN CONTINUED—MISFORTUNE.

“ TIME wore on for a while in the same unvaried, and to me tedious round ; but, before the sun had twice made the circle of the zodiac, events took place, which effectually roused every aoul of the tribe, and gave us variety and excitement enough at the expense of security. Our enemies, the Eersanees, although they entertained a bitter sense of the injuries they had received at our hands, were for some time too deeply embroiled with certain branches of the Salera Toorkomans, and with their distant neighbours, the Oozbecks of Bockhara, to make any serious attempt at reprisals : but about two years after your departure we were alarmed by a report, that they had arranged their difference with Abool Fyze Khan, the ruler of the Oozbecks, agreeing to pay him a certain stipulated military aid, and to leave the whole of his territories unmolested by their plundering parties ; and moreover, having entered into a coalition with their former enemies the Saleras, they were now turning their thoughts towards revenge upon us, who had so often wronged and insulted them.

“ The first decided proof of the truth of these reports was the arrival of several fugitives from some distant aouls of our tribe, which had been surprised and destroyed by the Eersanees. The sight of captives brought to camp was familiar enough, and we were all well acquainted with the tattered, haggard and dejected appearance of persons

in such a situation: but those who now sought our tents were our brethren, people of the same tribe and name, fleeing from pursuit of our common enemies, and bringing home to us tokens of the misery of war and plunder.

"So formidable and unlooked-for a league on the part of our enemies demanded measures of corresponding vigour and precaution on ours; and the chiefs of the Tekehs, meeting in council, resolved on applying to the Yamroulee and Allee-ailee tribes, who, by position and connexion, were the natural enemies of the Eersanees, and proposing terms for an alliance of an offensive and defensive nature. This was instantly agreed to, and measures were as immediately taken for repressing the destructive plundering parties of the enemy. These measures were successful in a certain degree; but the security which had for many years been enjoyed by the remoter aouls of the tribe, was fatally broken up.

"This disturbance between two Toorkoman tribes was a signal for universal confusion; for the Oozbecks of Bockhara and Ourgenge, in endeavouring to support the prerogatives of their respective tribes, became themselves embroiled; their dependants on either side took arms of course, and the whole of the Dusht-e-Kipchawk* was thus involved in bloodshed and desolation. No place, however remote its situation, from the banks of the Attruck and the shores of the Koolzum,† to those of Oxus, were safe from the bands of plunderers, which traversed its wide surface in every direction. Even our sweet retreat at the Chushmah Jemallee was threatened; and, as the strength of our aoul was called upon for active service at a distance, our chiefs would not venture to leave the women and valuables in so defenceless a situation; so they resolved to abandon it. I cannot describe to you, Ismael, the anguish I suffered at quitting, in all probability for ever, this beloved spot, the scene of all my infant delights—of all my sweetest and most painful recollections.

"On the day which preceded our removal, I was totally unable to work. My heart was full to bursting, but I could

* The name given to the wide extent of Desert which stretches eastward and northward from the shores of the Caspian sea.

† The Caspian sea,

not weep ; agitated by a feverish restlessness, I wandered about, and vainly sought relief in gazing at every well-known object, which was soon to be seen by me no more. How powerfully, dear Ismael, did they recall every moment I had spent with you?—every scene we had visited together, every act or word of endearment that had passed between us, came back with powerful force, and the future grew dark, opposed to the brightness of the past, until hope itself seemed to vanish in the gloom. That day the sky was overcast, and the air was sulphureous and heavy. The thunder rolled heavily in the west, and the sun was hid behind huge masses of dark lurid clouds. Towards evening there fell a heavy shower, which refreshed the earth, and gave a delicious coolness to the air. The sun, just before he set, burst through the clouds that surrounded him, lighting up their edges with crimson and gold, and throwing a long line of glittering radiance over the boundless plain. I went for the last time to the height above the fountain, and looked abroad over the wide landscape. The still waters of the little lake lay at my feet, reflecting the blue sky that now shone clear above me ; the grass sparkled with the rain-drops, and the pastures beyond were studded with innumerable flocks and herds, returning for the last time to their pens. All was sweet and tranquil ; and the thought that I might see it no more, came so mournfully across my mind, that I was quite overcome,—my heart swelled, and I burst into tears. Oh, what a relief they gave me ! how different was the melancholy which I now felt, from the bitter, suffocating pain that oppressed me in the morning ! A prayer of thankfulness to the merciful Creator rose spontaneously to my lips, and I returned to the tents for the last time with a lightened heart. It surely was a presage of happiness after the stormy day of misfortune should be past.

“ Next morning, before day-break, the whole aoul was in motion towards the east, and in three days were settled for a time in the vicinity of a stronghold not far from Merve, belonging to a branch of the Yamroulees, where the women were considered to be in safety, and the cattle could be subsisted for a season.

“ My father and Selim were by no means unemployed

during the transactions I have related. Omer Khan being considered one of the most active chiefs of his own branch of the Tekehs, he was called upon both in council and in the field, whenever a case of difficulty came to be decided on, or when an expedition of more than ordinary danger required a bold and experienced leader; and the uncommon prudence and fearless gallantry of his son could not long remain unnoticed, so that he soon became even a greater favourite than his father.

"This war of the tribes grew more desperate as time rolled on, for every alternate success exasperated the vanquished while it elated the conquerors; and bloody feuds increased in number and in virulence, for the contending parties seldom met in combat but one or other of them had to deplore the loss of some chief or champion, who fell a victim to his own over-ardent courage, or the obstinate pursuit of some implacable opponent.

"For more than twelve months had this desultory but bloody warfare been carried on, and many a widow and orphan had cause to curse its obstinate continuance, when it happened that the chiefs of the united tribes received intelligence by means of spies who had pushed far into the Desert, that a strong and chosen body of Eersanees and Saleras were on their march to attack a large camp of Yamroulees, settled on the Moorghaub river to the southeast of Merve. It was resolved to waylay these marauders; and, for this purpose, a party of Tekehs and Yamroulees, all picked men, were selected, and the command of them was given to my father, while another body of only half the number was intrusted to that of his son. The first was ordered to march directly towards the point of attack, where it was supposed they would fall in with the Salera and Eersanee robbers; the latter was directed to scout in a somewhat different direction, in order to take advantage of any deviation which they might possibly make from the straight course, and, if possible, to harass and keep them in check until the larger party should come to their assistance.

"Although in the course of the war there had been many expeditions undertaken of equal importance and hazard with this, I know not how it happened, but certainly a greater

anxiety seemed from the first to prevail regarding its success, than for that of any that had preceded it; perhaps this sensation was prophetic of the calamities about to assail us, the first of which was to fall upon this devoted band. Many sinister omens, indeed, were afterwards remembered, which ought perhaps to have warned them of their fate, and which at all events should have been noticed by those who professed to tell the evil from the happy hours, and to guide the warrior's path according to the rules of mysterious science. For three nights before the expedition set out, the dogs of the camp howled incessantly, and particularly around my father's dwelling. A favourite horse of his, one which should have been his charger on the march, was found dead at his pickets, without any marks of violence, and without any previous disorder. The jackals and wolves came in multitudes into the very heart of the camp; and a heavy flight of vultures were observed sailing away in the direction of the intended expedition. As my father's musician attempted to play a martial air, at a feast which he gave to his officers on the night before they set out, a string broke three times running; nor could he tune the instrument to its usual pitch, so that it sent forth a wailing sound, so remarkable that my father desired him to cease, for he did not want a funeral howl. Nay, it was even whispered that the baneful constellation of Yooldooz* was in the ascendant, though unseen, at the very hour when they mounted their horses to set off.

"Such auguries, had they been remarked, should have warned our friends sufficiently against an enterprize which could not be otherwise than unfortunate;—but fate stops the eyes and the ears of the foredoomed—no doubts were entertained, no fears were felt by our brave young men, and the whole party assembled in high spirits. I shall never forget the gay and gallant appearance which they made when drawn up in order on the plain, but a few hundred yards from our tents: their horses pawed the ground with impatience, and neighed aloud, while the spear points

* A constellation so called, to the baneful influence of which much evil is attributed by the superstitious Persians.

and steel caps glittered in the first beams of the morning sun. My father, bravely equipped in a solid steel-linked coat of mail, and a richly embossed helmet with a bright sharp spike upon the top, and skirts of steel-woven chains hanging down over the neck and shoulders, left his tent before the break of day, and busied himself for a while in examining the condition and preparation of his troops. When he was fully satisfied, he returned to the tents for a moment to take leave of his family; and in spite of the determination which sat upon his features, I thought I could detect a cast of thoughtful gravity, unlike the eager and almost youthful energy which used to characterize his deportment on such occasions. He gazed earnestly on his younger children, and a shade of anxiety flitted over his countenance as he kissed them round. When I approached, he took me in his arms, and turning to Selim, who was also prepared to march, 'Remember, my son!' said he, 'should any thing befall me, I leave you in my place—these children become yours:—be kind in particular to this unfortunate one, the sun of whose life has been darkened: pluck the thorns of sorrow from her feet, and shelter her from the blasts of misfortune;—let her heart rest in peace, if not in happiness, under the shadow of your arm!' I wept as I embraced him, and a foreboding fear came over me;—but the drums and the trumpets sounded; he hastily caught up his spear, threw his shield over his shoulder, and mounting the horse which was ready to receive him, galloped to the troop, which instantly got into motion.—I never saw him more!

"Standing with others of the women upon the wall of the old fort, near which we were encamped, we watched the troop as they filed from their ground into the order of march. The dark and fluctuating body advanced but slowly at first, under the cautious control of their leaders, who had no small difficulty in restraining the impetuosity of the younger gallants: indeed, these might be seen every now and then darting from the column like arrows from a group of archers, bounding and curveting over the plain, to subdue, as it would seem, the fire of their steeds, but in reality to give vent to their own overflowing spirits. By degrees, however, order was attained; the column

lengthened into marching order, and the leaders moving faster forward, carried the whole party briskly into the Desert, where they soon faded into an undefinable mass, then into a dark speck upon the waste, and finally melted entirely from the view. I watched them until my straining eyes, blinded with tears, could no longer distinguish them, and then retired to weep at leisure. Alas, it was the prelude to more bitter grief!

"But five days had elapsed from that of their departure, when the camp was thrown into consternation by the arrival of one or two fugitives, on horses sorely jaded, and gored in long wounds by the sharp stirrup-iron,—who reported the utter destruction of our party, and the death of the Khan their leader. But as these persons bore no great character for courage, and as no confirmation of their report, was received for two whole days afterwards, we began to recover from our panic, and to think that the report, if not entirely false, was at least greatly exaggerated. At the end of that time, however, our doubts were fatally removed, and the full extent of our misfortune was forced upon our conviction.

"On the afternoon of the seventh day, the sentinel posted on the top of the old fort perceived a cloud of dust in the distance, which gradually approaching, proved to be occasioned by a body of armed men, who were holding their course slowly towards the camp. Presently single horsemen might be discerned, who, leaving the main body, came on at a more rapid pace :—the alarm which was at first excited, subsided at this unequivocal proof of their being friends, and soon indeed we discovered in them the precursors of the wretched remnant of our troops, who had so lately left us so high in spirits and in hopes.

"No sooner had they reached the camp than a wail arose from the women. Bloody, wounded, and exhausted, their appearance alone was sufficient to strike us with dread ; but we were not long left in suspense. They told us, in a word, that the Khan was killed, along with nearly all his party, and that Selim, who had also suffered severely, had with much difficulty succeeded in carrying off his father's body, and effecting a retreat from the superior numbers by which he had been assailed.

"Amid the cries and lamentations of all the camp, which now poured forth to learn who had been made widows and orphans by this disaster, the survivors arrived. Their welcome was melancholy; shrieks rent the air as each family caught the tidings of a father, a husband, or a son having fallen, or received from his more fortunate companions some relique in proof of his fate. Small time, indeed, had there been to collect such memorials, and still less had the few who escaped from the general fate been able to carry off the bodies of the slain. Such marks of general respect could only be paid to one or two favourite chiefs, whose bodies had been recovered by efforts of the most devoted and persevering courage. Among them was that of my father; and a louder wail arose as Selim, aided by some chosen friends, approached, bearing his honoured remains, rescued from insult at the expense of their blood. A melancholy band they were, indeed; wounded, tattered, soiled with blood and dust, just as they had made good their retreat from the field of their defeat.

"The Khan had been greatly beloved and respected in the aoul; his arm had been to them an unfailing support, and under the shadow of his prowess the people believed themselves secure: when, therefore, the old men and the women found their foremost friend and champion taken from them, their despair was unspeakable; even private grief gave way for a while to consternation at this public calamity; they bewailed the misfortunes of their tribe, and, shaking their heads, predicted the total destruction of this branch of the Tekehs. Despondency was spreading fast, and one might have thought that the foe was already close to the camp, and that all power of resistance was at an end. Selim, wounded and exhausted as he was, perceived the fatal impression, and made a powerful effort to counteract it: he ordered his father's body to be carried to the tents, while he turned and addressed himself to the surrounding crowd.

"My friends," said he, in a clear and steady voice, "this is not a time for yielding to weak and womanly grief. We have sustained a great loss, it is true; and my own share in it is not the smallest—but reverses of fortune are common to all mankind. We have often been victorious;

for once we have been worsted : by the blessing of Allah we shall be successful again and again ! Who is exempt from misfortunes ? The blessed Prophet himself (praised be his name !) was forced to fly from the malice of his enemies ; yet, see ! his law has penetrated to the uttermost parts of the earth.—Let us not brood over our losses,—let us try to repair them. We have lost many comrades, but we have still many brave soldiers, who are ready to shed their blood in defending their families and properties against their foes. Let us instantly take measures for placing all that is dear to us in security. What is the use of yon fort, but to protect our wives and children ?—What Eersanee will venture to approach them in it ? If, indeed, we stay here in open plain bewailing our loss, they may pursue us and make it greater ; but the wolf at bay is dangerous, and who dare to attack him in his den ? Should they be rash enough to approach, we shall give them a reception such as will convince them that the Tekeh's are still to be feared. We have lost a great commander,—may Heaven receive him to its mercy !' his voice faltered, and he paused for a moment ;—' What then ? we have elders enough for counsel ; and for a leader in combat, I, young and inexperienced though I be, am ready to accept the dangerous, perhaps the invidious post, and, aided by the advice of our eldest warriors, will provide Insh-allah !—for the safety of the aoul. Let us, then, spend no more precious time in grief, my friends, but each to his task : let not darkness find us unprepared ; let our tents be struck, let the women and children be placed in the stronghold, and let such of our cattle, as we cannot properly secure, be driven far off beyond the reach of our foes, should they be mad enough to pursue and attack us in our den.'

" An appeal so spirited, to people overwhelmed with grief and consternation, had all the effect he expected. The voice of Selim, like that of a heavenly messenger, arrested the dangerous panic, and roused their paralyzed energies. A bustle of activity immediately commenced : the sun was well nigh setting ; but ere his beams had departed, the tents were struck, and, together with the most valuable of our moveables, were safely deposited within

the precincts of the fort, where accommodation was hastily and rudely prepared for the women and children. Horses and cattle, men and women, were packed within the old mouldering walls ; and a small detachment was sent with the most valuable portion of those animals which could not be so protected, to a distant pasture, where it was believed that an enemy would scarcely dream of following them.

“ Even those who had but just arrived after seven sleepless nights, weary and wounded as they were, laboured in completing these precautions. The different approaches to the place, and the breaches in the walls were barricaded with such materials as were to be had ; and where this could not be done, the women laboured in digging trenches to impede the approach of horsemen. In some places pits were made, armed with sharp pickets and covered over with reeds and grass, to serve as traps into which an enemy might fall as they rushed on to the assault. About four hours after sunset, the place was rendered capable of a stout defence ; and not till then did Selim or his weary companions refresh themselves by a hasty meal, and seek a short repose. The women, stimulated by the danger which threatened them, and inspired with confidence by the gallant bearing of their young chief and his courageous companions, exerted themselves in providing for their comfort ; they washed and dressed their wounds, stiff and inflamed with the unceasing toil of many days ; and chafed their swelled and weary limbs, exchanging their soiled and tattered garments for more comfortable raiment. Such food, as time and circumstances allowed of, was prepared ; and having set a careful watch from among our fresh men, we all retired to rest, every man with his arms at hand, to be ready in case of a surprise.

“ It was only after these arrangements had been completed, that Selim was able to attend upon his widowed mother, and endeavour to speak some words of comfort to her wounded soul. Under the temporary shelter of some black felts, supported by a few spears and wooden poles, was laid the body of Omer Khan ; and by it, on the ground, sat the Khanum and the women of the family, my-

self among the rest. A low wailing murmur, or a deep sob burst from among us at times, as we bent over the dead; but we were too much worn out by toil and anxiety to be clamorous in our grief. On the appearance of Selim, his mother arose, and, throwing her arms around him, burst into a passion of tears. This gave a fresh flow to our sorrow, and the place again resounded with bitter weeping and lamentations. Alas! these sounds were universal throughout the camp.

"But Selim, solicitous to counteract rather than to encourage the enervating effects of grief, after indulging his mother for a few moments, besought her to control her feelings. 'He who now lies there a lifeless corse,' said he, 'would never at a moment like this, when the safety of his tribe was at stake, have suffered a selfish feeling, either of sorrow or of joy, to interfere with his duty. You, mother, should encourage the women of the camp by your example, to show themselves worthy of the name they bear. Heaven knows how soon they may be required to aid in the defence of their families and their honour!—And you, Shireen, assist my mother to dispose of these remains as best may be, for this night; endeavour after that, to recruit your strength by sleep—the coming day may be a trying one.'

"While Selim was yet speaking, the Khanum, whose convulsive burst of grief had already a little subsided, slowly lifted up her eyes, and fixed them on his animated countenance. She controlled her heavy sobs, and her tears gradually ceased to flow,—'Yes, my son, you are right,' said she; 'this is in truth no time for idle grief, nor shall your mother in her last hours give you cause to blush for her memory. I know that my hours are numbered; it is that which consoles and supports my spirits—for I would not; and I shall not survive your noble father:—the struggle which is fast approaching will terminate my life, but your mother will do her duty; you shall see her perish at her post.'

"Selim sought to reason her out of this solemn, mournful mood, but he could not succeed;—she spoke no more, but shook her head, and smiling faintly, rose with her women to make such arrangements as time and the occasion

required. As for my brother, such was his anxiety for the safety of those whom Providence had thus placed under his care, that he could scarcely be persuaded to attend to his own wants. He was wounded in several places, but it was with reluctance he permitted us to wash or bind up the gaping cuts; and though he had scarcely tasted food for several days, he now appeared indifferent to what we placed before him. It was while we forced our assistance and attentions upon him, that he gave us a short account of the disaster which had destroyed our friends and their chief.

“The march of the Khan had been prosperous and uninterrupted, until he almost reached the point where he hoped to intercept and surprise the enemy. But his spies had been treacherous, or ill informed, for he was utterly deceived with regard to the numbers of the enemy. They, it seems, were better served; for while our people were halting to refresh, at some distance from the place of their intended ambuscade, they were suddenly alarmed by the galloping of horse, and before they could well gain their horses, a strong body of Eersanees poured in among them, cutting down and destroying many while yet defenceless. The Khan, after the first surprise was past, rallied a part of his men, and charging a party of the assailants at the head of his best armed champions, scattered them, and thus gained some moments, which the rest took advantage of to form and join him. Fresh numbers, however, came up, and increased the force of his opponents so greatly, that my father was unable to keep his ground; but he retreated with so good a face, that they could not prevent him from gaining the summit of a little eminence. There he maintained himself for many hours against twice his numbers, in spite of hunger and burning thirst; for the only springs within reach were in possession of the Eersanees.

“Charge after charge was made upon this position, and each, as it came thundering on, threatened to annihilate the fast diminishing numbers of our friends: but they received their enemies with so determined a countenance, and poured on them such well-aimed flights of arrows while these missiles lasted, that after a serious loss of men, they

retired to consult and take breath for a while. Just at this time, a cloud of dust at some distance announced the approach of a reinforcement to one or other party ; and it was not long before our men became aware that it was their friends, under command of Selim, who had been watching another body of Eersanees at no great distance. He had learnt the situation of his father from some fugitives who fled in the first confusion, and had hastened with all speed to his assistance, hoping that their combined force might be able to dispose of the Khan's opponents before the troops he had been watching could come up. In truth, the aid he brought could not have been better timed ; it raised the drooping spirits of our wearied troops so much, that my father, taking advantage of their enthusiasm, became in turn assailant, and forced the Eersanees to give ground. But this gleam of good fortune was transient ; just as they were indulging in the hope of victory and safety, the troops which Selim had been watching, came hot upon his traces ; their friends, encouraged in their turn, returned to the charge, and the Khan and his son were once more forced back to the eminence they had quitted : and there they maintained themselves during the rest of the day.

“ Each charge, however, now made havoc in our ranks, for arms, as well as strength, began to fail ; and towards the approach of evening, my father, sensible of his critical situation, determined, if possible, to strike some decided blow, that might terrify the enemy, and force him to abandon the field. Calling, therefore, around him the few survivors of his most trusty champions, he made an unexpected and furious attack upon a body of their opponents, which was in the confusion of a discomfited charge. The effect was perfectly successful, and he was pursuing his advantage, terrifying the flying wretches with his shouts, and opening a bloody path before him with his sword, when his horse, exhausted by incessant fatigue, stumbled and fell. This unfortunate accident was instantly observed : the Eersanee champions rallied, and, while our men were endeavouring to maintain their advantage, and assist their chief, bore down and overwhelmed the greater part of them with numbers. My father, entangled with his horse, was

trampled on and speared in a moment, along with many of his followers; and this handful of brave devoted men would have been entirely destroyed, had not Selim, who remained on the height, watching with anxiety and alarm the issue of this daring attempt, made a sudden rush with those about him to the spot. His impetuous charge once more drove back the Eersanees, but too late to do more than recover the body of his father. The day was lost to him: and retiring once more to the height, he contented himself with acting on the defensive, against the few faint attacks which the enemy thought fit to attempt. They had suffered even more severely than our people, in proportion to their numbers: and, contented probably with having frustrated our intentions, broken the flower of our tribe, and acquired no small booty from our slain, they drew off at night-fall, and left the field.

"The moment it was ascertained that they had retired in earnest, my brother, who distrusted their apparent moderation, began his retreat towards the camp. It was matter of life or death, and every one urged on his jaded horse until many fell dead with fatigue hepeath their riders. Few and short were the halts they made, and at each of them the band was diminished by the number of those who dropped from wounds, from weariness, or loss of horses. They had scarcely any provisions, nor had their horses any food, except that which they could pick up among the scanty herbage of the Desert. Of near eight hundred men who marched on this disastrous expedition, scarce two hundred returned to camp, and so exhausted were these, that they could not have held out another day;—had they not reached it that night, the greater part must have perished in the Desert.

"Although our party had met with no actual interruption during their retreat, there was yet sufficient reason to fear that the victorious Eersanees would not leave a beaten foe unfollowed; and the more experienced among the band declared that they had observed sure symptoms of pursuit. So fully impressed had Selim been with the probability of such an event, that on reaching camp, he had exerted himself, as I have already related, to be prepared for the worst. When he had satisfied himself that

no more remained to be done, we urged him to take a few hours' repose, and he lay down in his clothes and arms, upon a carpet for that purpose. But slumber will not always be commanded : while the mind is kept wakeful by anxiety, it is in vain for the body, however exhausted or fatigued it may be, to say, 'Come, I will take repose !' Selim tossed and turned upon his couch, unvisited by sleep, or if weariness united with the deep silence around him to lull his senses into a temporary dose, it was disturbed and unrefreshing, and the quivering motion of his limbs, and frequent starts, betrayed the uneasy activity of his mind."

CHAPTER XX.

STORY OF SHIREEN.—THE CAMP ATTACKED.

"EQUALLY anxious as my brother, and still more agitated, I lay sleepless as himself, watching his restless form as it started under the impulse of every coming thought ; and when at length, yielding to the painful solicitude which increased as the night wore past, he rose and went into the open air, I rose and followed him. He had reached the top of the wall when I joined him, and was carefully surveying the dim horizon around, listening at the same time with deep attention. 'What! Shireen?' said he, as soon as he saw me by his side, 'wherefore is this, my sister? why have you left your couch so early? was your labour last night insufficient to ensure you a sound sleep?'—'I am concerned to find, my dear Selim,' replied I, 'that the labour and distress of many nights have failed to procure for you that necessary refreshment; but, oh! my brother, consider, I entreat you, that you are now our only stay; that both for the sake of your family and the tribe, which looks up to you as their leader, you should guard your life and cherish your health!—think what would become of us were you to be taken from us!'—'It is these very considerations, Shireen, that govern my present conduct. Be satisfied, I will not needlessly expose either life or health. But I am, as you have just now said, the leader of my tribe;—a disaster which we

must long deplore has made me so, and I have received this trust at an awful moment. I did not dare admit it to the timorous multitude around me last night, but to you, Shireen, I may confide the truth; we are most critically circumstanced at this moment. We have sustained a terrible defeat: our loss has been great, and it has fallen upon our best and bravest. Unless we shall receive prompt and decided assistance from our allies, I know not how we shall hold out against the force which I am persuaded will soon appear against us. We are pursued, it is not to be doubted: when the Eersanees discovered that we had left our post, they must have followed to harass our retreat. They might have been detained awhile plundering the camp which we endeavoured to defend, but they could never commit so great an oversight as to permit a beaten enemy to retreat unmolested through so vast and unprovided a Desert: the extraordinary rapidity of our retreat may have disconcerted their intentions of overtaking us upon the march; but, depend upon it, they are upon our traces, and will soon be here. Who is to vigilate over the safety of the camp, if I am negligent? See you not that every one is buried in the profoundest slumber? I cannot even place confidence in the sentinels on the walls;—it is I who must watch and alarm my weary soldiers if the foe shall approach.'

"'I see it, brother; I see it all: this is no time for repose, nor could I sleep now, if it were. I will watch then with you; and believe me, nothing shall approach my post unchallenged.'—'Well, my dear Shireen, I accept your aid: seat yourself on this broken tower; keep your eye constantly ranging along the dim line of the horizon, and do not neglect the dusky plain more close to us: but your ears may be more useful than your eyes; listen with all your attention, and, on the smallest suspicion of a sound, summon me without delay. On that side the dawn will break, and from that quarter, too, will our foes approach, though they perhaps may choose to make their attack from another point.' With these words he quitted me; and wrapping myself up in a thick, woolen jubbah, I leaned over the mouldering parapet, and kept my eyes constantly wandering over the plain below.

"The night was perfectly calm; the stars shone in full glory, shedding a hazy light on a few of the nearer objects, but adding to the dimness and uncertainty of every thing beyond. The profound silence around me was only broken by an occasional complaint from one of the pent-up cattle, the kick or the neigh of a horse, or the moans of a wounded man, as the pain of his hurts disturbed his heavy sleep. So intense was the stillness, that imaginary noises sometimes filled the ears; and more than once, I roused myself in alarm at the fancied jingling of bridle chains, or the faint clash of arms. The light step of Selim, as he made his rounds from point to point, was the only sound which gave relief to my soul: it told me, that amid the ominous silence, there was one human friend near me, and in him alone, after the omnipotent Allah himself, did I put my trust.

"It might have been three hours after midnight, when a strange instinctive sense of alarm crept over my faculties, which were now wound up to an intense degree of acuteness. There was no sound within my ears, nor could I refer the consciousness which I had of some movement in the great plain before me, to the information of any bodily sense. It resembled the intuitive perception we receive of the vicinity of an object when just about to run against it in the dark. I was straining my eyes and ears to detect some sound or motion, when Selim stood beside me. 'Have you heard nothing, Shireen!'—'I cannot tell, brother; but I feel as if danger were at hand.'—'Then you have heard it, too?'—'What, brother?'—'I am convinced they are coming!—I am certain that, the earth shook with the trampling of many horses; but I will know the truth before long.' With these words, he made his way over a ruinous part of the wall, and going to a little distance in the plain beyond, I saw him lay himself upon the earth, where he continued motionless for some minutes. 'It is as I thought,' said he, when he returned; 'I am satisfied now: I heard the trampling of a large body of horse. But if it be as I think, they have halted, and probably will not approach any nearer for these two hours to come. We need not, therefore, rouse our harassed men so soon: they will have enough of it, when it comes.

me after a while, 'You are a woman,' said he, 'and should be merciful; I beseech you give me some more water, and draw the broken arrow from my back that I may die,—so may Allah help you in your hour of pain!' The appeal was not in vain: touched with his sufferings I turned him gently on his side, held the water to his mouth, and once more bathed his temples; but my fortitude almost failed me as I sought for the bloody shaft, and drew it with an effort from the wound. The blood gushed forth in a torrent, but the pain instantly ceased;—'Thanks, kind creature!' he faintly exclaimed, as he once more fell upon his back: 'may God protect thee! My gratitude is due for this good office:—avoid the northern side of the fort, the assault will be hottest there—the bastion there is'—He could not finish, a hoarse rattle in his throat announced the last agony; and shuddering at the sight, I quitted the body and sought for Selim.

"I found him rousing the chiefs and the trustiest of his friends, to prepare for the fierce approaching contest.—There were not five hundred men within the place, though it contained more than double that number of woman and children. But you, Ismael, can tell that a Tekeh woman can draw a bow, or wield a spear upon emergency, almost as effectually as her husband. In a short time all were awake; men and women were informed of the danger which threatened them, and told that their only chance of safety lay in fighting with heart and hand to the last drop of their blood. The more experienced and trusty warriors were stationed at the weakest points, with such a force as could be spared; spears and bows were placed in the hands of the most courageous women, in order to support their husbands or their sons in case of need; and every one was enjoined to remain in perfect silence and concealment, at their stations behind the walls or ruins, until the signal to show themselves should be given.

"By the time these arrangements were completed, the false dawn had appeared; and we listened with painful impatience for the sounds which were to summon us to action. Oh! what an interval was that to many, who, like myself, were but little inured to scenes of blood and strife! Seldom had the din of war reached us at the re-

tired and beautiful Chushmah Jemallee ; and even since our removal to this new place, we had rather been alarmed by the distant thunder of the tempest, than had suffered from the visitings of the storm itself ; but now it was howling around our very camp, and murder and rapine, with all the horrors of actual war, within a single hour were to burst among us, and make us their victims. If the camp that day had possessed no better defenders than myself and many others of my sex—had all trembled as we did—the affair would have been speedily terminated ; but it pleased the Omnipotent Disposer of events to order it otherwise.

“ The darkness which often succeeds the false dawn of morning in the Desert, had fallen with deeper gloom upon the plain, when a low rushing sound, like that of a breeze among the reeds, caught the quick and practised ears of the elder warriors. ‘ The enemy comes on ! ’ said Selim to the officers around him ; ‘ listen to my directions before every one hastens to his post ; and remember, that the fortune of this day—yea, the fate of your families and your own lives—depends upon exact obedience. Let every one conceal himself with care ; let not a sound be heard : we must make the enemy believe us unprepared—unconscious of his being near us—off our guard—asleep. Let no one stir until they hear my voice ; then up and upon them in the name of Allah. Let clouds of arrows drift in their faces ; but let not one be shot without an aim. The spearmen also will have objects to strike at with effect by the time they hear my voice, and then ; Bismillah ! let them strike home. But let no man leave the walls :—let them feel the strength they contain, but let not that strength be wasted in streams that may flow from them, but may never return. You comprehend me all, my friends ?—are my directions understood ?—’ ‘ Yes ! yes ! you have said well—Aufereen ! aufereen ! * His father could not have spoken better ! ’ cried all the chiefs ;—and each and all repaired to their posts.

“ The sullen sound of the approaching host had now become more audible ; while every noise within our camp

* “ Admirable ! admirable ! ”

was hushed to perfect stillness. The very horses, which stood ready saddled at their pickets, seemed to catch the spirit of their chief ; not a neigh or a foot-tramp was heard. The dogs, crouched beside their owners, were kept with difficulty from uttering the sounds which their instinct prompted, as they snuffed the coming foe ; although an uneasy whine, or a stifled growl, would sometimes escape to tell of their alarm. The lowings of the cattle alone were heard, as they rose from time to time upon the silence of the morning, as if to tell our enemies that the camp was still undeserted.

“ As the trampling of the host approached, the eyes of all the leaders were strained to detect the dimensions of their column, and their ears to judge of its numbers by the sound. They whispered together, but I could not hear what they said.—‘ Hush !’ cried Selim, near whom I had instinctively crept, ‘ either they halt, or are about to change their course : the sound is no longer uniform and deep ; be attentive all ! they have separated—I am certain of it.’

“ The chiefs and elders were soon convinced that their leader was in the right. The approaching body had certainly divided, for the sound now came from two distinct quarters ; swelling on the ear in the one, and becoming fainter in the other. At this moment I remembered the words of the dying spy, and mentioned them to Selim. ‘ Hah ! my sister !’ returned he, ‘ this may be of importance ; in God’s name I will attend to it !—and the hint has just come in time, for I doubt not the detachment which has just left them is destined to take us on the weak side ; but we are stronger there than yet they know of.’

“ A dull grey light now showed itself in the east, and objects upon the plain began to be visible. A dark moving mass was presently to be distinguished ; and the glimmer of arms, which broke obscurely from it, would have declared it to be our approaching foes, even had the increasing sound failed to betray them. They halted for a few moments when half a mile distant from the camp, and, separating into three divisions they approached in perfect silence. Nothing but the tread of horses was heard from their ranks : death itself was not more silent than we were.

They halted once more when not two hundred yards from the walls, perhaps surprised at, or suspicious of the total silence within. About half their number then dismounted, and prepared to enter the fort by the many breaches which time had made. Just as they set foot upon the mouldering fragments which lay heaped beneath the wall, in some places to half its height, a loud yell burst from among them; but the voice of Selim was heard above them all, 'In the name of God arise my friends! Scatter the miscreants! Victory for the Tekehs! Revenge Omer Khan!'—'Allah-hu-akber! Tekeh! Tekeh!' echoed every man within the walls, as they rose from their ambush: the dogs let loose, flew with hideous yells on the assailants, and hundreds of arrows were showered on them with deadly aim.

"Confounded at this unexpected reception, which turned their own device against themselves, all of the assailants who were in a condition to retreat, drew off with precipitation to a little distance, leaving the slope beneath the walls thickly strewn with dead and wounded men. So steadily had the ambush been preserved, and so close had the enemy been permitted to approach, that many fell by spear-thrusts from behind the parapet; and the arrows told with such fatal force, that they pierced through mail and quilted coat, up to the very feather on the shaft. But our foes were yet too confident from their late success, to suffer so easy a repulse. They knew not probably how serious had been their loss in this first assault. But now they went more cautiously to work; and half their number advanced to renew the storm, while the rest stood ready to assail the defenders of the camp with their arrows. They did so, however, at disadvantage, for our people, protected by the parapet and breast-works, were too little exposed to suffer materially; while, on the other hand, almost every shaft from the walls told on our assailants, and the few who succeeded in reaching the foot of the wall, were speared the moment they attempted to ascend it.

"Still, however, they persevered, with an obstinacy of courage which called forth our admiration; and we yielded them this more readily, because our own spirits were now so much elevated, that we anticipated their total discomfi-

ture, and our own consequent deliverance and repose. But our cries of triumph were silenced once more by a fresh alarm. The party which had separated from the enemy before their approach to the fort, after taking a considerable circuit, had now made their appearance on the northern side ; and believing this manoeuvre to have been unforeseen, they attacked with loud shouts, nothing doubting of success.

" Their exultation was premature :—it was to defend this weak point that the pitfalls had been dug the night before ; and the hint of the dying spy had induced Selim to station some chosen men behind them, while he himself kept a jealous eye upon every thing that passed in that quarter. The advance of this fresh body had therefore not been made unperceived, in spite of the din and the uproar. The post was strongly reinforced, and my brother hurried in person to repel the first assault.

" But the force of the onset was broke by more passive engines. Tempted by the easier slope, the horsemen thought to put an end to the business at once, by galloping over every thing into the body of the place, or at least by pushing their horses up to the very foot of the mouldering wall. But as they thundered along, the deceitful surface gave way, and men and horses floundered into the pits and staked themselves in numbers on the spikes at the bottom. The bowmen, taking advantage of their confusion, poured a destructive flight of arrows on the dense mass ; and to complete the havoc, twenty picked men rushed down from the walls, and speared without mercy all they could reach. At length, those of the enemy who found means to extricate themselves from the medley, retreated beyond arrow-flight and joined their comrades, while our twenty men returned unhurt within the walls.

" Daylight had now fairly broke ; the first beams of the sun shot level across the plain, and gilded the eastern front of our camp, which was covered with the dying and the wounded. Many of our own friends were mingled among these, for we had not escaped unharmed. But the loss sustained by our assailants was so great, that though their numbers were still formidable, their courage evidently wavered, and they stood for a while irresolute. Nevertheless, furious,

and doubtless ashamed at being forced to abandon their enterprise, they made another attempt. Forming themselves into one deep compact column, they advanced as if resolved to force success by means of physical strength opposed against a single point ; but while the foremost of their troops were engaging our attention, the main body filed off at full gallop in the rear, and dividing into several parties, dashed forward to the points which they believed to be the weakest or worst defended. The manœuvre was skilfully executed, but it was full as skilfully opposed, and the enemy were every where met with so much steadiness and effect that they quickly recoiled again, with great additional loss. It was not without anxiety that we saw them once again draw off, out of bow-shot, into the plain, and form into a compact body : for though our spirits were elevated by successful resistance, we could not contrast the still formidable and threatening mass before us, with the weak and weary troops that manned our walls, without some uneasy sensations ; and I think there was not one among us who did not feel relieved when our foes, after a few minutes' consultation, were seen sulkily turning round their horses' heads and shaping their course to the northward, carrying along with them such of their wounded men as were able to crawl towards them. Even then we could not feel secure : we still feared that this retreat might prove a feint, that they would return once more, and in short, that our struggles and our dangers were not yet at an end. By degrees, however, we were relieved by observing their movements ; for stretching right forward into the Desert, they held on their course without halting or turning, until distance concealed them from our view, and the cloud of dust they raised, alone indicated their track :—it reminded me of the luckless departure of my father and his brave band, and, though I could not but rejoice at our providential deliverance from our foes, my grief for the heavy misfortunes of our family was bitterly revived.

“ Our success was dearly bought—many of our bravest friends had fallen, and even our women had suffered in no small degree—for they had not flinched from their duty, and many were found dead at their posts, when the re-

treat of our enemies gave us leisure to look around. Among these victims was the Khanum herself, who was found mortally wounded on the northern wall, where the assault had been fiercest. She had been singularly active throughout the whole affair, encouraging both men and women in their duty. Although wounded slightly more than once, she would not listen to the persuasions of her attendants, who would have had her retire; 'No! no!' said she, 'it is not time yet! my work is not over!' And when the yells of the enemy were heard on the northern face of the fort, she flew with the rest to that point, cheering the defenders with her voice, while her arrows flew sharply and true among the assailants. We found her faint and gasping for breath on the very edge of the broken wall, where she had been fully exposed to the whole drift of arrows, that swept the place like a hail-shower. A faint smile lighted up her features as we approached,— 'This is as it should be,' said she feebly; 'I knew—I wished it to be thus. And are these Eersanees gone?—are they fled? beat off?—that is also well;—it is pleasant to die victorious!—Selim,—take my blessing,—I go to your father! It is your business to revenge his death!—you have begun it well.—Bury me with him, my son!—Shireen, you have been a kind and dutiful child to me—farewell! and bless you also. I fear! I fear! this is but the beginning of woe and misery—but God's will be done!'—These words were spoken painfully and at intervals, and they were her last. Her half-closed eyes gradually lost their fire, a slight convulsion distorted her features for a moment, but it soon passed away, and the spirit took its flight to the realms of Paradise!

"The events of this night confirmed, beyond all question or dispute, the title of my brother to the chief command in the camp. The acuteness, decision, and soundness of judgement he had displayed; his unwearied watchfulness, and indefatigable activity, as well as his conspicuous gallantry and personal prowess, had endeared him so much to the tribe, that all the elders, as well as the surviving chiefs and warriors, with one voice declared that to him they owed their safety, and he alone was worthy to continue their protector and their leader. Alas! it

was a difficult and dangerous post—he lent his aid to prop a falling fabric ; for the strength of the tribe was completely broken by these calamities, and from that time forward he had to support a constant struggle for quiet, or rather for existence, which at length terminated in utter ruin.”

CHAPTER XXI.

STORY OF SHIREEN CONCLUDED.

“THE exposed border station which we had hitherto occupied, was now become too dangerous for our reduced strength: and we found it expedient to retreat farther from the reach of our foes, to a position near the protection of our new allies, the Yamroulees. I have observed that our life had become a struggle for existence ; and it was one of the most painful kind, for with our power and influence we found our independence also gone. A tract of country near the districts occupied by the tribes of Diroom and Nissa was appointed for us to range over, and there was in it a station on which we could establish a stronghold ; but nevertheless, we found ourselves obliged to suffer many indignities and exactions of one sort or other from our kind allies, who, seeing us reduced, and, as they conceived, in their power, did not hesitate to turn us to their own uses, and make us feel the value of their protection.

“It is unnecessary to relate the succession of misfortunes by which our unfortunate people was bowed to the dust ; nor need I dwell upon the unwearied, though too often fruitless struggles by which my brother continued to uphold the credit and influence of his tribe. As if a withering spell had been laid upon us, every effort failed, every scheme, however judicious, was frustrated ; and though his own name became exalted as a warrior of the highest class, his influence as a chief, diminished every day with the decreasing number of his followers.

“Still earnestly pursuing his one favourite object, of restoring the lost importance of his tribe, he watched with

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great solicitude the intrigues of the border chiefs of **Khorasan**, whose restless ambition was constantly involving them in disputes with strangers, or with one another. It seldom happened that the **Toorkoman** tribes could keep aloof from these disputes, for it was the policy of the contending parties to enlist these tribes as allies on their respective parts, while the numberless hereditary feuds among them encouraged such coalitions, and had no small influence in the distribution of the opposing parties.

“The chiefs of **Diroom** and **Nissa**, uniting with some of the discontented **Sheikanloo Koords**, resolved some short time ago, to make a vigorous effort to get rid of the restraint in which they were held by the officers of **Nader Koolee Beg**, who as you know, had reduced them and all the other chiefs of the North to acknowledge his authority. These chiefs held forth most tempting offers to all the divisions of the **Yamroulee**, **Tekeh**, and **Yamoot** tribes, who range between **Merve** and the **Attock**; and they readily agreed to join the coalition. My brother, conceiving very sanguine hopes of success from the power and respectability of the allied chiefs, accepted with eagerness of a command, which, as it required a more than ordinary share of sagacity and enterprize, they all agreed could not be placed in fitter hands than his. In order to strike the blow they meditated with certainty and effect, it was necessary that the troops of **Nader** should be watched, and the numerous passes of the hills guarded, to prevent surprise: it was this service which **Selim**, with a considerable body of young and active warriors, undertook to perform, and there is no doubt, if the coalition had been ultimately successful, that the manner in which he executed this duty would have gained for him a degree of credit and influence most important to his future prospects. That they did not succeed, was no fault of my brother's; so well did he select his spies, and so active were his emissaries, that not a movement of the enemy could pass unnoticed: even their intentions were anticipated; and though villages and forts were destroyed on the very skirts of the hills, the destroyers themselves were never surprised or discovered. Frequently, when service of a dangerous and delicate description was to be performed, he would confide in no one, but

acted as spy himself, and many a narrow escape has he had from the vigilance of his enemies : nor can I even now think without shuddering at the risks he encountered.

“ But Heaven had not willed that our party should triumph. Jealousy broke out in the councils of our chiefs, and paralysed the vigour of their measures. The gold and promises of Nader’s officers had armed our enemies against us, and our camps were attacked from the Desert, while those who should have defended them were carrying fire and sword into the villages of the Kuzilbashes. Many of our people left all other duty to defend their homes, and the passes were thus left unguarded, so that the troops of Nader, under command of his brother Ibrahim, descended unopposed to the plains, and attacked the forces of the principal combined chiefs, which were encamped near Diroom. The doubt and distrust which had arisen among the chiefs, spread its baneful influence among their followers ; no man felt confidence in his neighbour, nor cared to expose his life where he could not be assured of support or co-operation. From such a state of things, no favourable result could be anticipated ; the battle soon became a rout, many of the combined troops were slain, many were made prisoners, and the army was totally dispersed. This disaster put an end to the coalition. Each chief made the best terms he could for himself ; and the tribes returned to their deserts. But they did not retire unmolested ; for, resolved to make an example which should strike them with terror, and prevent such incursions in future, the officers of Nader sent their soldiers to extirpate every tribe, and destroy every stronghold, which had taken arms against their commander. This order was executed, as far as could be done with savage punctuality, and many a camp was destroyed, and many a family hunted individually to death :—as for us, we fell an earlier and an easier prey.

“ Our camp and little fort had been quite drained of men, for every one capable of bearing arms had followed Selim on his dangerous service, so that none but old white-bearded men, remained with the women and children, to look after the flocks and herds of the aoul. We entertained no dread of danger, for we knew that our friends stood

between us and the only quarter from which we had reason to apprehend an attack. This dangerous security perhaps rendered us neglectful of ordinary precautions ; a very indifferent watch was maintained ; but, in fact, we were so helpless and unprotected, that though such measures might have warned us of coming danger, it could not have preserved us from its effects.

" One morning, before the dawn of day ; we were roused from sleep by a howl from all the dogs of the camp, succeeded by a fearful barking ; and before we could well start from our beds to learn the cause of the uproar, it was sufficiently explained by the thundering sound of many horses, which was drowned in its turn by the appalling yell of their riders, as they burst into the camp, and, clearing every obstacle, penetrated in a moment into the middle of our small fortification.

" Oh, Ismael ! how can I describe to you the horrors of that morning. The sweet sleep of perfect security was broken by the terrible shouts of our murderers, and we opened our eyes only to see the cold gleam of their swords, or received them in our bodies as we started to our feet. Many, unconscious of their danger, met their death-blow, before they recovered from the dizzy confusion of sleep : others made vain efforts to escape, but were pursued and disabled in a moment by the pitiless assassins. The aged of either sex were butchered without inquiry ; but when they saw that no resistance was offered, that there were none, in truth, able to resist, they ceased to slaughter, and commenced plundering. Such of the survivors as were considered worth the trouble, were bound as prisoners, and before the sun was an hour high, our camp was a mass of smoking ruins, and its few remaining inhabitants were driven, together with their cattle, in one herd, before the plunderers.

" Of our family, scarcely one escaped this finishing blow ; all who were advanced in years here lost the lives they had preserved through so many changes, nor were the young much more fortunate : my two brothers, fine promising youths, had left the camp with Selim ; the remaining children of the Khan were never seen after this fatal morning. Your little Sitarah, and the nurse who still at-

tends me, were all that were to be found remaining of our once numerous and powerful house. Ah, Ismael, what a heart-breaking change was this from the time when you knew us prosperous and happy at the sweet, the beloved Chushmah Jemallee !

“ But the cup was not yet full. In spite of our consternation and despair, we remarked, that instead of being led towards the Desert, our captors took a direction southward, toward the skirts of the hills. Towards noon they were joined by another party, who appeared to have returned from a similar and equally successful expedition. The children and women were now disposed of on camels, and placed in the rear, while the armed men kept in compact order in front. In the evening a cloud of dust was observed ahead of our line of march, and a very little time was sufficient to show that it proceeded from a troop of horsemen, greatly inferior in numbers to our captors, but we prisoners could form no judgment of who or what they were. No sooner, however, had the two parties approached each other, than the shouts and the tumult of battle announced that they were enemies—friends, no doubt to us : and oh ! how fervently I prayed that Allah might give strength to their arms, and make their swords keen and resistless. But it was otherwise decreed ; after a long and terrible struggle, the din and the clamour ceased, and we saw a party of our captors approach, leading and driving along with shouts of exultation another group of prisoners. My heart misgave as I witnessed this fatal extinction of my last hope ; but oh ! the sickening pang that overwhelmed me, when, among the foremost of the prisoners, in spite of the blood and dust with which he was covered, I recognized my brother Selim !

“ A piercing shriek escaped me at the sight. ‘ Selim ! my brother ! can this be real ? ’ cried I, involuntarily struggling to stretch out my tightly bound arms towards him ; — ‘ then the worst is over, and we have only now to die ! ’ He started at my voice, and made a desperate struggle to approach me, but, weak from loss of blood, he fell back into the arms of those who held him.— ‘ I knew it ! I was sure of it ! ’ cried he : ‘ Shireen ! Shireen ! now indeed I feel I am a captive !—If ye have any hearts, let me be near her,

—that can do you no harm—no fear of my seeking to escape when she is here—if ye are men, for the sake of those ye love most, do not separate me from my sister !”

“ Whether the men were touched at our distress, or that the arrangement which took place was the result of accident, I know not, but it did so happen that in disposing of the prisoners Selim was placed near me, and our guards did not object to our marching side-by-side. It was plain, from the precautions made use of, that they considered him as a prize of no small importance, and were resolved to leave him no chance of escaping ; yet no unnecessary cruelty or roughness was used ; his wounds were bound up, he was accommodated with a horse, and though his arms were tied, and he was securely strapped to the saddle, yet his bonds were not drawn so tight as to give him pain. We had thus the sad comfort of conversing together, and mutually recounting the particulars of our misfortunes.

“ It appeared that Selim, alarmed at the prevailing reports of disturbances in the Desert, and losing all hopes of succeeding in an enterprize which was already sacrificed to the jealousies of its leaders, began to feel that it was time to think of his own affairs, and provide for the safety of his family and camp. He informed these leaders of his intention, and took the road homeward with his followers :—Alas ! it was already too late—he came but to add to slaughter and misery !

“ While still half a day’s journey distant from the camp, a single horseman was observed advancing towards them at an unusual speed ; and they soon recognized him for one of those who had been left at the camp to watch their herds and flocks. On the night of its destruction, he had been looking after some brood-mares in a meadow at some distance, when he heard the marauders approach. Instantly comprehending the danger, he mounted the first of the animals he could catch, and galloped off to alarm the camp. But finding it was already too late, he turned, and used all the speed he could, to reach the border, in hopes of encountering some party of the friendly Toorkomans, who might overtake the plunderers and release their prisoners. It was while pressing forward with this intent, that

he encountered my brother and his party on their return to camp.

"Horror-struck at these dreadful tidings, poor Selim and his followers urged on their already wearied horses, resolved to know the worst, and to pursue the plunderers, and rescue their surviving friends at every hazard. It was while thus pressing forward, and breathing vows of deep revenge against the authors of this outrage, that they encountered them returning with their spoil:—the train of captives and animals loaded with booty, declared sufficiently from whence they came, and, burning to punish so atrocious an aggression, as well as to release their wives and children, our friends disregarded the superior numbers of their enemies, and instantly spurred their horses to the charge.

"The contest was long and bloody; but the disparity of force was overwhelming on the side of their enemies, and the wearied men and jaded horses of our friends could not withstand the force of their powerful and well-appointed antagonists; one after another, they were borne to the ground and destroyed, until at last the few that remained, hemmed in and surrounded on all sides, were forced to submit to the conquerors,—most of them were sorely wounded. Of my brothers—those young and ardent boys whom I have mentioned, one was killed by the side of Selim in spite of his efforts to defend him, and though no one could tell what became of the other he too must no doubt have perished.

"How Selim himself escaped with life it is difficult to comprehend. More exposed than any of his men, he sought to destroy his opponents, and guard the lives of others, rather than protect his own; yet the spears and the swords that strewed them around him, failed to light upon his head: he was wounded in many places, but not so as to endanger his life.

"Such was the account he gave me as we painfully pursued our way. 'And now, Shireen, I must believe that my career is about to close. It is plain they are carrying us to some of Nader's commanders, who doubtless has orders to put us to death as rebels. And for myself I care not how soon they bare the scymetar which shall dis-

miss my soul to Paradise. I have seen the ruin of my family, the destruction of my tribe,—why should I linger on, and rot peacemeal, a miserable dependent on strangers, unable to recover the honours of our name, or to protect those whom Heaven had placed under my care? It is time that Selim should depart, when the hand of destiny is laid so heavily on him, that it seems as if he lives under a spell, which brings ruin on all that cling to him: even you, my sister, will fare better when I am gone.'

" 'Oh, Selim!' cried I, when the choking sobs that rose in my breast would give me utterance, 'how can you, at such a moment as this, add bitterness to the despair with which your sister is overwhelmed? whom has she to lean upon but you in the world?—what would the world be to her if you were taken from her?—Oh, no!—I never could, and never would survive you; and if indeed—if it should happen as you say, most willingly shall I lay down my head upon the pillow of death, for all the joy of life would then be departed!'

" 'And what has life now for me, Shireen? what object is there left, except indeed yourself, to knit me to earth?—You, who have known me from boyhood until now, can tell how entirely, how zealously I have ever devoted myself to the glory and the welfare of our tribe, and of my father's house. To increase the honour and prosperity of his family, and preserve unsullied the lustre of his name, if not to add to its brightness by my own deeds, has been the object of my dreams by night, and of my thoughts, as well as actions, by day. All has been in vain! the blight of misfortune has withered my hopes, and the shadow of my arm, instead of yielding protection and blessings, has spread darkness and ruin on those who sought shelter beneath it. It is enough, Shireen!—it is enough. The sun of Selim's destiny has set: the winter of his days is already come, and the grave opens to receive its victim. My bones will not rest in the Desert with those of my fathers; but my spirit will taste the joys of Paradise with them: nor will the dark-eyed maids frown upon a warrior whose face has ever been towards the foe, and whose sword was always forward to defend the true faith. For our fate, my sister, I still must grieve; and

were I once more a free man, perhaps for your sake I might still be content to live. My soul is galled to think that you will remain in the power of some haughty Kuzzilbash ; but the will of Heaven be done ! Allah-hu-Akber ! God is great !”—In this way did Selim give vent to the bitterness that filled his soul :—for my part, my heart was full, and I could only answer by sobs and tears.

“ Our guards continued the march till night-fall, and I never can forget the horrors of that halting place. Food or drink was a luxury that fell to the lot of few, and the groans and ravings of the wounded, calling piteously for water to quench their burning thirst, yet rings in my ears ; many of them terminated their sufferings and their lives on the spot where they lay down, and their guards perhaps were not sorry to be relieved of so troublesome and profitless a charge. Their conduct to Selim and myself was, however, widely different ; our accommodation—I had almost said our comfort—was attended to in a remarkable manner ; my brother's wounds were dressed as well as circumstances would permit, and a decent portion of food was provided for us. My inexperience led me to augur a better fate and happier issue to our adventures from all this attention, than Selim had anticipated. But his mournful smile checked my hopes. ‘ You little know them, Shireen,’ said he : ‘ the care they bestow upon us only marks the value which they set upon our lives, and that value consists in the reward which they expect to receive from my enemies for my head : let us not shut our eyes to the signs of destiny ; what is written is written !—we are all in the hands of God !’

“ Our journey to Mushed was long and painful. When we reached the first Kuzzilbash camp, our conductors gave up their prisoners to the commander, an officer of Nader Koolee ; whose joy when he learned the name and quality of my brother, sufficiently declared the value of his prize. No time was lost in sending us forward to the capital under a strong escort ; but the comparative consideration which we had hitherto experienced, was now exchanged for the insolent rudeness and neglect, which generally falls to the lot of prisoners. A horse was provided for Selim, it is true, because he was obviously un-

able to walk, but his arms were tightly pinioned, and all attention to his hurts was at an end. My comfort was so far consulted, that they furnished a camel with kajawahs which carried Sitarah and myself; and thus shut up I was prevented from witnessing the sufferings of my less fortunate brother, who, when we met at the evening's halting-place, was unwilling to distress me by dwelling on the harsh treatment and pain he had endured during the march. As for me, the agitation and wretchedness of mind I had endured, added to the fatigues and bodily sufferings of this terrible journey, were more than my health could stand; and before we reached Mushed, the delirium of a burning fever had rendered me insensible to all around me. I have since understood, that when our arrival was reported to the governor, Selim with certain others of the prisoners were ordered into the most rigorous confinement until the pleasure of Nader regarding them should be known. With the females it was not thought necessary to deal so harshly, and huts were therefore provided for their temporary accommodation in the quarter near the Oozbeck caravanserai, where the Toorkomans who were appointed to take charge of them had their residence. These arrangements were made during the time I remained insensible; and it pleased the beneficent disposer of events to move with compassion the wife of one of our escort, who, pitying my helpless condition, had me conveyed to her cabin, and took the care of me upon herself. It is to her humane attention I owe my life; for when the fever, no longer kept up by the constant irritation of travelling, had run its course, and left me,—when I became restored to consciousness, but was sinking fast into the grave with weakness, it was her kind, unwearied attention that revived and preserved the spark of life. But she was poor, and could not afford the comforts and expensive remedies which were necessary to restore my exhausted frame; and worse than all, the recollection of the horrid scenes I had witnessed, and the dreadful doom which hung over my unfortunate brother, like a canker in my heart consumed the springs of existence, and baffled all her well-meant exertions. It is to you, my dearest Ismael, that my restoration to life and hope is truly due. Had not Providence

brought you to my aid, the grave would have soon closed over one who had lost all that made life pleasant. But it is not so now; your undiminished affection has revived my love for life, and fain would I spend what remains of it with you !”

CHAPTER XXII.

THE GOOD FIGHT.

SHIREEN was now fast recovering her former strength and beauty. The contrast between the uncertainty and alarm of her late life, and the peace and serenity of her present existence, had a powerful effect on the health both of her body and her mind. She felt that the storm of misfortune, which had destroyed her family piecemeal, and left her a wretched unprotected orphan, had blown over, and she found herself at last secure from insult or want, under the protection of the only man she had ever loved, but whom she never hoped to meet again. I took delight in watching the progress of this salutary change, and rejoiced to see that neither time nor misfortune had robbed her of her charms.

One only cloud threatened our happiness. The life of Selim was still in jeopardy, and the more anxiously I examined the chances in his favour, the more convinced I became that his peril was extreme. I could not entirely deny my apprehensions to Shireen, but carefully concealed from her their extent. In truth, I hardly dared to trust myself with reasoning upon the subject. I knew that he was safe until the general should arrive, and resolved, when that should happen, to exhaust my credit, and peril my own life, if it were needed to save his. I could do no more, so I sought to quiet my own apprehensions while soothing those of Shireen.

Nader at length arrived; I was on duty in the Istackball* which went forth to meet him, and lost not a moment

* The procession deputed to meet and receive a great man on his arrival at any place is called an “Istackball,” literally opposition-meeting.

in presenting myself at the Durkhaneh when he entered the palace. But he was surrounded by so many officers and khans that I could not approach his person. He acknowledged my obeisance with a look and some words of favour, but the pressure of business was too great to allow me to indulge the hope of a private audience, so I returned to Shireen thoughtful and dispirited.

That evening the gholams and officers of his Highness' guard received orders to hold themselves in readiness, as their attendance would be required by sunrise the following morning at the palace gate, where business of importance was to be transacted. I felt a nameless alarm, an unaccountable concern and uneasiness, as I listened to this summons; but I failed not to attend at the appointed place and time. There every thing declared the bustle of preparation; but I knew not yet its object, and sought to learn it from a brother officer upon the ground. "What!" replied my comrade; "where can you have been that you are ignorant of the General's intention to examine this morning the rebels connected with the insurgents of Diroom, who have for some time past been confined in Mushed?" A thrill of horror seized me on hearing these tidings, but I strove to command myself, and asked my friend whether he knew the persons who were in jeopardy—"Oh," replied he, "there are some Koords, and some of the chief of Diroom's principal officers, I hear; but they speak also of some Tekeh Toorkomans, and a chief of consequence and great enterprize, whose name I have not heard." It was enough,—it must be Selim and his fellow prisoners who were thus speedily to be hurried before the General for judgment—and judgment in such a case, was it not the same as death itself?—Sick with dismay, I reeled against the wall for support,—“So soon! so dreadfully soon!” exclaimed I mentally. “But this is no time for weakness or despair; we must act, and that decisively.” I passed onward, and entering the palace gate, soon found myself in the court before the hall of audience.

The court was already crowded; khans and officers of every rank, in gay suits of armour and gorgeous dresses, were mingled with the more sober garments of the Meerzas and Moollahs, the men of letters and of law, who were bid-

den to attend in order to render the ceremony more imposing. Guards, gholams, executioners, and furoshes hurried about with busy looks, arranging every thing according to the orders that were issued by the Essek Aghassee, or director of the ceremonies. But the hall of audience itself was unoccupied; only a menial or two issued now and then from behind, and flitted across the apartment, as if to examine whether all was prepared.

At length the arrangements were completed on a scale of pomp and solemnity more striking than I had almost ever witnessed. The attendants were more numerous than usual; the court was almost filled with lines of guards, gholams, executioners, and other officers, all dressed in their garments of state and of office; and the blue gleaming from the naked swords of the fulfillers of the law, was sufficient to strike terror to the heart of the boldest delinquent. The drums then beat to arms; the troops without the wall of the palace fell into their ranks; and the music of the Nokara Khaneh* burst forth in full swell, as Nader, preceded by the officers and servants of his household, entered the hall, and took his seat at the upper corner, with the stern but composed aspect of resolute justice. Every one bent low in salutation as he appeared; and then stood silent as death, with their hands crossed upon their breasts, awaiting the words of authority.

At a signal given by the Essek Aghassee, the Khans, chiefs, and officers, advanced to make obeisance to their General, who courteously returned their salute; and then making a sign for attention, he addressed them in these words.

“Khans and leaders of the armies of Iran; chiefs of the cities and the tribes of Khorasan; may the meeting of this day be fortunate!—I have called you together to witness an act of eternal justice. It is known to all of you how the Almighty and beneficent Creator of the Universe has blessed the arms of his servant with victory, and has deigned to make them the instruments of driving from the fertile plains of Persia, the Affighaun robbers, who had long

* The band of music which plays on occasions of state before a great man, and is usually stationed in an apartment over the gateway.

plundered its villages, desolated its cities, and made the land a desert. The ryot now ploughs his field and reaps its produce in peace; and the merchant once more fills the long bazaars of the capital with his rich goods, and supplies again the wants of a crowded population: for the farmer and the trader live secure under the shadow of an hereditary sovereign. The same blessings were bestowed upon Khorasan. Peace reigned throughout its extensive and numerous districts, and Mushed, the holy city, the refuge of saints, lifted up her head once more, rejoicing in her prosperity.

"But while our victorious troops were shedding their blood to expel the enemies of their country from their usurped acquisitions in the South, the spirit of evil moved certain chiefs and tribes of the North, ever prone to turbulence and revolt, to disturb the tranquillity of these happy regions, and to unite themselves with the Toorkoman robbers of the Desert, for the purpose of setting at defiance the royal power, and of promoting their own ambitious views, at the expense of the public prosperity. The Supreme Ruler of the Universe, however, has not seen fit to suffer such depravity to go unpunished. The governors of districts, and commanders of fortresses, received orders to march against the rebels, and they were scattered before the victorious troops of the state, like dust before the breath of the whirlwind. Some of these miscreants departed at once from the field of battle to hell; but others of their chiefs have fallen into the hands of our officers, and are now in safe custody. It is fit that these should suffer, as an example to all evil-doers and breakers of the public tranquillity; and it is to witness this act of justice that I have summoned you hither this morning."

How earnestly did I drink in each word of this harangue, which, delivered in the full clear tones of Nader's voice, was distinctly audible at a far greater distance than that at which I stood. I watched its effect on those around me, many of whom had full often offended in the very point which now called down so stern a doom on others. But no symptom of conscious guilt—no shudder of disapprobation, was to be detected; an indistinct murmur of applause alone, arising timidly and constrainedly from the

crowd, marked the deep awe in which they stood of the stern chief before them.

A bustle at the gate, rendered more audible by the profound silence that reigned in the assembly, now announced the approach of the prisoners, and drew every eye to the entrance of the court. It was a moment of deep interest to all, but how doubly so to me! My breath came thick, and a mist fell upon my eyes, which dimmed and confused every object. Even when vision returned, it was long ere I ventured to turn my gaze towards the spot where the captives stood.

It was a striking and solemn sight, even to those who were well inured to scenes of blood. There stood more than twenty brave men, many of them chiefs of no mean fame, and all of them well practised in bold and gallant deeds, bound like the worst of malefactors, ready to be slaughtered like beasts of the field at the signal of a chief more fortunate than they, because they had ineffectually dared to oppose his ambitious, but prosperous career. The general indignation and horror, which prudence had at first suppressed, was now too strongly felt to be altogether concealed; for there was many a one in that assembly, who felt too much in unison with the prisoners, to be able to look with perfect composure upon the tragedy that was about to be performed, and the quiver of disgust, which slightly agitated their features, betrayed their secret sentiments. But what were their feelings to mine! Slowly and fearfully I raised my eyes to the group, who, with arms securely bound, and persons squalid, neglected, and emaciated by long confinement, stood closely guarded in the centre of the court.

I turned with comparative indifference from the foremost of the prisoners, for their apparel was that of the Koords, and I knew not those who wore it; but my heart beat quicker as my eye fell upon the Toorkoman dress, the well-known garb of the Tekehs. Wretched, it is true, was the appearance of those who bore it; but it spoke powerfully to my heart, for it was the dress I had worn so long; and eagerly did I search each countenance for the features so deeply engraven on my memory. Suspense was soon at an end;—among the haggard and worn-out

figures of the Toorkomans, there was one who, in spite of his tight-drawn bonds, his failing limbs, and wasted frame, preserved an erect and lofty bearing, which fixed the gaze of every eye. The sunken death-like cheek, the hollow eye, and the gaunt emaciated figure, added as they were to the years of toil and sorrow that had withered his youth, formed no disguise to me : Nature spoke in my heart, and I could not be deceived. It was Selim ! the first glance was enough. But how can I describe the misery of that glance ! The recollection of the gallant-spirited, joyous youth I once had known him, with all the blessed remembrances of our happy boyish days, and the dreadful wreck which, after such an absence, he now appeared, rushed upon my mind in fearful contrast, and quite deprived me of reason. Every thing but him was forgotten :—I flew to him, and, clasping him in my arms, fell on his neck and wept aloud. The buzz of amazement which this strange conduct gave rise to, was unheeded by me ; I felt not the rough grasp of the soldiers who sought to tear their prisoner from my hold ; I heard not the orders of the officers, nor even the stern command of Nader, to separate and bring us both before him : I only saw—I only thought of Selim, and felt that he was in my arms.

It was some minutes before I recovered power to speak ; passionate bursts of tears and convulsive sobs choked my voice ; nor was Selim, in spite of his habitual self-command, less overcome than myself, when, after the first moment of astonishment, he comprehended who had thus embraced him. Even the soldiers and executioners who surrounded us, respected the bitterness of our emotion, and ceased for the moment to molest us. “ Oh Selim ! ” said I at length, “ that such should be our meeting after a parting like ours ! But take courage, you shall not die !—the General must listen to my prayer—he honours me with the favour of his countenance ; doubt it not, you will be safe.”—“ Ismael, dear friend ! I thank the all-merciful Allah that he has given me the comfort of seeing you once more ; but do not deceive yourself, there is no grace for me ; my doom is sealed.”—The commands of Nader, reiterated in thunder, could no longer be disregarded :—we

were separated ; but both were instantly hurried before our stern judge.

"What means this audacity?" demanded he in a terrible voice. "Ismael, can you be the madman who dares to interrupt the course of justice, who presumes to insult your master by disturbing the solemnity of his tribunal? Say, what can such conduct mean?"

"May I be your sacrifice, my Lord," replied I, prostrating myself before him ;—"I acknowledge my fault, my madness !—but my brain is troubled with distress ! Grant, I beseech you, my Lord ! one boon to your faithful servant, whose heart will break with sorrow if your Highness should refuse his prayer !—Grant to him the life of this young prisoner, his earliest companion, his first and dearest friend."

"How!" cried the General with an ominous frown, "are you mad in good earnest? or have I not heard aright? Grant you the life of a condemned rebel, of a convicted traitor! Begone, young man! and be thankful that our indulgence overlooks your fault ;—retire—leave the guilty to their fate."

"Oh! for the sake of the Prophet and of Allee!—by the holy name of Allah himself! my lord and my master, I entreat your forgiveness :—extend your bounty to your unhappy servant, and grant him the boon he humbly solicits!"

"Beware! young man, beware how you provoke our wrath ;—be wise in time. The boon you seek cannot be granted.—What! a chief of rebels, whose bold pertinacity has worked more evil to this province and my cause, than all the rebellions of the Koords, or the plundering incursions of the Oozbecks themselves! Get thee gone, youth! another word, and my favour is lost to thee: bethink thee how thou mayest endure my wrath!"

"It is impossible," exclaimed I; "my most noble master will never crush his slave for soliciting a boon like this. By all the favour your Highness has ever vouchsafed towards his slave—by all the devotion of that servant to your person and your cause—by the soul of your father—by the honour of your name! do not refuse me!"

"Fool! madman!" exclaimed Nader in a voice of

thunder, "then take the consequences of thy folly: here, guards! here, Nujjuff Allee, lay hold of this traitor; he is no longer my servant!"

"No longer your servant, tyrant? thou sayest well," cried I, frantic with rage and disappointment; "I renounce your hollow favour, and your thankless service. It is thus you repay the blood that has been shed in your defence, and redeem the promises and pledges you have given.—But I abjure both you and them, and thus I fling away the tokens of my weak devotion! Let your executioners come forward, and let me die with my friend; my true friend, who failed me not in the hour of need, but periled his own life to save mine." While uttering these words with the greatest vehemence of voice and action, I threw upon the ground my sword and shield, and tore off my armour, with every distinguishing mark of the rank I bore: and running up to Selim, I exclaimed, "Now, my friend, now, my brother, we part no more! our fates are one!"

More than once had Selim attempted to interfere. "It is in vain, my friend," said he, "strive not with destiny.—My hour is come, and I would not wish to defer it.—Throw not vainly away your own life."—But I did not, would not hear him, but embracing him with a firm grasp, quietly awaited my fate.

The guards now approached to seize us; but at this moment the manner of Nader changed: his rage appeared to be suspended, and the frown which lowered on his brow, changed for a moment to an expression, which, but for the strange contrast it offered to that which had just left it, might have been taken for that of surprise not unmingled with admiration; but it passed away, and was succeeded by an air of stern composure. A signal of his hand stopped the rude discipline which the executioners were preparing to apply; and after speaking a few words to an officer beside him, he turned, and said to me, "Young man, you have forgotten yourself; but you shall find your master is not apt to do so.—Let these two prisoners be separately and strictly confined, until our farther pleasure be declared." This order was addressed to Nujjuff Allee Khan, and immediately Selim and myself were taken from the court of audience. Once, as we were led through the

narrow passages of the gateway, we found ourselves close together ; but the time permitted only a few sentences : " Why have you been so rash, my dear friend ? " said Selim ; " you have ruined yourself, and have deprived poor Shireen of her only protector, without the smallest benefit to an unfortunate wretch, who, after all, would rather court than shun his fate. "—" I could not have acted otherwise, my dear Selim. I cannot, and I will not serve such a tyrant any longer : the sooner such a game is terminated the better ! But Shireen ! for her indeed !—but no matter—God is great !—he will protect her—it is past : may God protect you, farewell ! "—" Farewell, my friend, forever ! " Our guards hurried us asunder, and I soon found myself lodged in a small, and strongly guarded, though not uncomfortable chamber, where the door being securely barred, and a sentinel placed outside, I was left to my meditations.

It was long ere the tumult and high excitement of my mind subsided enough to allow me to consider the predicament into which I had fallen, with any degree of calmness. A fearful alteration had, indeed, taken place in my condition. That morning I had risen prosperous, happy, and respected ; the favoured servant of a great chief, having affluence enough ; restored to the possession of a beloved mistress, and blessed with the fairest prospects for the future. In one hour the whole was changed :—friends, favour, fortune, mistress, all were torn from me, and I had become the tenant of a dungeon, from whence there was but little chance of emerging unless to death !

All this I had doubtless brought upon myself ; but how far was the unfortunate result of my efforts, to be imputed to folly or to guilt ? Of the latter, my conscience at once and fully acquitted me ; and after a strict review of my conduct in the whole affair, I could discover little cause for censure, either on the score of imprudence or want of temper. I had watched in vain for an opportunity to break the dangerous subject to my master : untoward circumstances had rendered a private audience unattainable ; and the suddenness with which the fate of the prisoners had been brought to issue, left me no other means of interference than those I had made use of. And could

I have been less earnest in pleading the cause of my earliest friend?—and such a friend! Had he spared himself, or did he shrink from danger when my life was at stake? and was I to calculate the consequences of a resolute effort in his favour when he was placed in similar circumstances?—No:—the inward monitor declared uncompromisingly that I could have done no less. In truth I had not waited to consult it: my heart alone had spoken, but my conscience and my judgment now approved the deed. “Come what may,” said I involuntarily rising to my feet, while a glow of self-approbation flushed my cheek—“I have performed my duty:—to have done less had been base, cowardly—more was not to be done.” My mind wandered back to the time when once before I became the tenant of a dungeon:—how different were my feelings then! Remorse, guilt, bitter self-reproach, bowed me to the ground—I was sick of mispent life, yet dreaded death. Now, though life had every thing to make it sweet, I voluntarily relinquished the blessings it promised me, and, embraced a violent death because my duty bade me make the gloomy choice—yet I was resigned, proud, happy!—

But sadder thoughts ere long rose in my soul—I remembered the friendless condition of Shireen; I thought of her devoted affection; and the conviction which I felt that she never would survive the double loss of her brother and her husband, was less painful to me than the fear of her living exposed to the injuries and insults of the world. For where can a helpless, unprotected woman be safe?—she is like the beasts of game, hunted by every heartless debauchee, until she is at last run down and lost. “And shall it be thus with thee, Shireen?” said I mentally;—“with thee who should have been the cherished wife of Ismael? It must be provided against.” But how?—The decision was replete with difficulty. After much consideration, two friends alone occurred to my mind—Meerza Aboo Talib of Ispahan would assuredly receive and protect the unfortunate mistress of his friend: but how to send her to a place so distant? It would require influence and friendly attention to secure her safety on the way; and to whom could I apply?—To Ibrahim Khan!—to the warm-hearted brother of the tyrant himself. His

honest, generous nature would forget the fault of one whom once he loved, although his unrelenting brother could neither pardon nor appreciate the motive which led to it:—he would not, surely, deny the request of a dying friend. To him, then, I resolved to bequeath the charge of conveying the unfortunate Shireen to the care and protection of Abou Talib.

When once I had come to this resolution, my mind grew more composed, and again I revolved every circumstance of the morning scene. But, after bestowing much consideration on all that had occurred, although there were some particulars for which I was puzzled to account, and which, in spite of my better judgment, would excite a faint ray of hope, I could discover nothing from which any inference could justly be drawn, of a complexion favourable to the fate of my friend or of myself. The strictness of Nader in all matters of discipline was notorious; and there was no cause for surprise at the displeasure he had manifested at my unexpected and irregular interruption of his assembly of justice, nor at his increasing fury when I continued to press a suit which had met with his disapprobation from the first. But my sagacity was at fault to account for his remarkable change of expression when I braved that fury, defied his power, and renounced his service. I had frequently remarked, it was true, that a spirited and manly bearing had a powerful influence on Nader; and that a bold and fearless reply would often obtain the pardon of an offender, where the whining prayers of a coward would probably have sealed his doom; and an idea would faintly strike me, "Could the General have relented? Could my bold words have found favour with his stern and peculiar mind? Was it possible that his change of mood could betoken a change of feeling and of purpose?—But no—it could not be:—when I remembered the terms in which I had abjured his service, and identified my fate with that of an acknowledged rebel, in the presence of all his court, I felt that pardon was impossible. Besides, there was no pardoning me without extending his grace to my friend,—on no other terms was it possible for me to accept of it; and that I felt could never be. Selim was an avowed, a condemned rebel, so at least was he

termed by his only judge ; and when was Nader ever known to pardon such a defaulter ? My reason bade me reject the wild idea, and I strove to drive it from my thoughts, and to consider my doom as sealed : but, spite of all my efforts, a doubt if not a hope, hung furtively about my mind, and would not be utterly excluded.

While striving thus, and not without success, to calm and regulate my mind, and to brace it up for future struggles, a thought unfortunately flashed across my brain, which upset all my equanimity, and filled me with dismay. It is a shocking but a very common custom, when an officer in high employment has unfortunately fallen into disgrace, and is imprisoned or put to death in consequence, to confiscate his effects for the uses of the crown, and to give his house to be pillaged by the executioners and furoshes who carry the decree into execution. In such cases the females of the family are generally subjected to the grossest abuse, even when this insult does not, as sometimes is the case, form part of the punishment. If this custom had been observed in my case, what must have been the fate of Shireen ? This horrid idea quite overcame my fortitude ; I pictured to myself the poor girl's despair at learning in so brutal a manner the occurrences which had deprived her of all her protectors : her frantic cries seemed to pierce my ears, and I saw her struggling in the grasp of some ruffian, seeking to pollute her last moments with his savage violence. I could not endure the images created by my heated fancy, and became furious at the confinement which I had hitherto borne with patience. I threw myself on the ground and groaned aloud. Unable to bear the horrors of suspense, I sought to call the attention of my guards ; and one of them at last entered to learn the cause of the outcry I was making. With much incoherence, I explained to him my fears, and entreated to know what had happened to those whom I had left in my house. " Oh, is that all ! " replied the man ; " depend upon it, your house, and all that it contains, is in very good hands. All there is safe enough." With this equivocal reply, in which my suspicious terror traced something of a sneer, he left me abruptly, as anxious and uneasy as ever.

But though the bitterness of my despair was unabated, I controlled the violent and useless expression of it until evening came, when the door of my prison opened, and a man entered, bearing food and drink for me. I did not fail to entreat his kind offices in procuring me information of my family; but he stopped me short—"I am commanded to assure you, Sir," said he, "that with regard to your family and property, you may rest in peace, for they are under the General's especial protection; whatever your fate may be, they will be respected. Thus much I am permitted to declare, but my orders go no farther. I know you well, Sir, and I esteem you. May God grant you a happy deliverance from your present misfortunes!" Placing his hand upon his breast, he bowed and withdrew, leaving me fresh matter for musing on.

My family under the General's protection!—*their* safety to be provided for at all events, and by *him*!—what could this mean? My doom then, was not yet fixed! it was strange! I was bewildered, perplexed—but the communication, as probably was intended, comforted and relieved me. Perhaps that faint spark of hope, which never wholly dies in the human breast, was gently fanned by it, even though unknown to its master.

After all, the night passed heavily: doubt and anxiety are sorry companions in a dungeon, and the troubled slumber into which I sank near day-break, was the effect of exhaustion alone. Morning came and brought no relief: and the weary day passed tediously away without incident—without a hint that might enable me to guess at my fate. Food was brought me in the morning and the evening, but those who brought it would neither speak themselves, nor reply to my inquiries. Another heavy night came on and passed away; but nature, worn out with anxiety and watching, at length gave way, and I sank into a refreshing sleep, from which I was only roused by the noise of removing the fastenings of my prison-doors. I started up, but had scarcely gained my feet before a Nassekchee, in his dress of office, and bearing his drawn sword, entered the room, attended by two of the General's guards, and bade me prepare without delay to follow them to the palace.

The appearance of the Nassekchee appeared to be conclusive of my doom; and however faint or unadmitted

were the hopes I had indulged, I will not attempt to deny that a cold shudder stole over me, as I looked upon this messenger of death : but pride and indignation came to my aid ; I regained my composure in a moment, and told them I was ready to attend them.

A sash was slightly tied round my arms, but they would not bind them behind me like those of criminals, although I held them for the purpose. "It is not necessary, Sir," said one of the guards, an old soldier of mine ; "we know you too well—you will not attempt to escape." Holding the sash by one end, they walked on either side of me to the palace, preceded by the Nassekchee, whose presence sufficiently declared the nature of my situation ; but there were few abroad in the streets at this hour, and we reached the palace without attracting much observation.

When the mind has been wound up to some great and immediate effort of its powers, the least delay of the expected crisis becomes insupportable. At the gate of the palace we were informed that the General had not as yet made his public appearance for the morning ; and that it was necessary we should wait until intimation should be sent of his being ready to receive us. Those who know the misery of awaiting the pleasure of a great man, even when their business is of trifling importance, may form some conception of the torturing impatience with which I, whose business involved not only my own fate, but the lives of others more dear to me than my own, sat counting the minutes for three mortal hours, until a furosh came to announce that his Highness desired our attendance in his khelwut. It may be thought, perhaps, that I had little cause to long for the interview ; but I have ever sought to meet and grapple with inevitable danger rather than to defer the evil day. If, in truth, I were doomed to suffer death, where could be the good of prolonging the term of life by a few anxious moments ?—better far to take the leap at once, than linger on the brink of the precipice. Besides, the whole business wore an air of mystery which had strongly excited my curiosity ; and I burned to unravel its meaning, even if death itself were to prove the solution of the enigma.

Nader was seated at a window in a corner of his private

apartment, which opened on a small court. Nujjuff Allee Khan, the commander of his guards, and one or two other officers, stood at a little distance within the room. Two Gholams on duty, a Nassekchee, and two or three furoshes waited below on either side the window in the court, to which we were now admitted.

My conductors, after bowing profoundly, awaited the signal of Nader to approach; and on this being given, they led me forward, in front of the window at which he was seated, and within a few yards of his person. I cast my eyes over his countenance, but nothing could be read there:—it was grave, composed, and impenetrable.

The General, on his side, seemed also desirous to feel his ground; for he bent a long and searching look upon my face, as if he would have read my inmost thoughts. But, unconscious of having given any just cause for all this severity, I supported this trying scrutiny, and neither quailed beneath it, nor returned it with unbecoming audacity; but after meeting his eye for some moments, I bent my own respectfully but without confusion on the ground.

"You have been sent for, young man," said he at last, "that I may learn whether you have yet regained your senses; and whether you at length comprehend and tremble at the dangerous predicament into which your wild and rebellious conduct has plunged you? Do you acknowledge the clemency, which, as yet sparing your rash folly, permits you still to draw the breath of life?"

"The life of your slave rests in your Highness' hands," replied I, in a firm but respectful voice:—"if, in an unguarded moment, he has been guilty of irreverent demeanour towards his lord, he laments his error, and would humbly sue for pardon. But rebellious sentiments, or intentional disrespect, he utterly disclaims; and he would humbly represent that his conduct hitherto affords the best proof of his loyalty."

"How, slave! Did you not brave my displeasure in the face of the whole court?—did you not avow yourself the sworn friend of an approved rebel?—and did you not publicly renounce my service, and solemnly devote yourself to your rebel friend? Is not this treason? is not this rebellion?"

"How should a slave contradict his lord? The words of your Highness flow from the fountain of truth; and the life of your servant is as the dust beneath your feet: let your Highness so dispose of it! What can I say?—despair and suffering are bad counsellors; but it is said that the Cazee should take no note of abuse from the wretch whose feet are in the fellick* by his orders. The commands of your Highness had inflicted worse agony on your servant than that of the bastinado; his heart was dissolved like water, and his brain was burning; how could he choose his words? But they are past: he is guilty, and merits death. Let the orders of your Highness go forth: your slave asks not for life."

"Hoh! still rebellious, I see—still devoted to your rebel friend—still preferring his service to mine. This is your gratitude for past favours! this your devotion and loyalty to your master! But he is a tyrant; a slighter of his faithful servants; and you, forsooth, will rather die than serve him, Mash-allah!—By the head of my father! were you once at liberty, we should have you flourishing the sword you have received from us in our own face, at the next rebellion of your Toorkoman friends!"

"My Lord, it is written, 'Let not a servant reply to his master in many words!' Your slave did hope that your Highness, who has long witnessed the conduct of your servant, would sooner or later do justice to his memory. But his heart is full. The words of your Highness are bitter, and force him to speak out. If gratitude can be shown by deeds, my Lord, your Highness may declare whether the miserable Ismael has ever been deficient in that respect. Has he ever been found absent from his post, where duty was to do? Did he ever hang back in the day of need? or in the hour of battle did he ever spare his labour or his blood? The favour bestowed by your Highness on his unworthiness has already testified the opinion you entertained of him; and he needs not again recall to your Highness' recollection, the promises, the assurances, vouchsafed to your servant, that whatever petition he might prefer should be granted. Presuming,

* The beam and noose by which the feet of criminals are secured when receiving the bastinado.

perhaps, too boldly on these assurances, he dared to solicit a boon—the life of a single prisoner—of his earliest and most beloved friend! Your Highness thought fit to reject this petition; though your unfortunate servant, in declaring the cause of his earnestness, declared also that his honour was pledged, and his heart so deeply interested in its success, that he could not support a refusal, and had vowed to share the fate of his friend! Your slave would humbly submit it to your Highness, if this be the way in which faithful servants should look to have their claims acknowledged?”

“But what business should my servants have to crave the life of an inveterate and condemned rebel? What have I to do with their private feelings or old attachments? The peace and safety of the country require that such criminals shall suffer death: how then can I release them at the prayer of any one whomsoever?”

“My Lord, since the day I entered the service of your Highness, your enemies have been mine, and I have shed my blood to defend you from them! How should it be possible, then, that a compliance with any petition your servant may prefer, should endanger the safety of the state, or the interests of my master?”

“Well, well! let that pass. Now mark me, youth:—Suppose this rebel Toorkoman were yet alive, should you be content to leave him to the fate he has merited, to solicit my forgiveness, and return to my service? Agree to this, and all that has passed shall be forgotten; your honours and dignities shall be restored, and a fairer course than ever shall be opened for your pursuit.”

The terrible inference to be gathered from these words, that the execution of my friend had already taken place, struck me with consternation:—“He is dead, then!” exclaimed I, “and his noble spirit is gone for ever! What, then, have I to do with life! Give up my friend, saidst thou?—Couldst thou restore the life that thou hast taken, and offer provinces and kingdoms as the price of forsaking him; and were instant death, or a life of increasing misery before me, as the penalty of keeping faith with him, I would cling to him until that death should overtake me. Hear me, Khan! His father snatched me, yet an infant, from

among the ruins of my house ; the son was my earliest protector and my friend. We passed the years of boyhood together, and though I was but a slave, he held me dear as a brother. Thus did we live on, increasing in affection as in years ; our games, our exercises were the same, and when we fought together for the first time, each thought more of shielding the other than himself, from the blows of the enemy. He saved my life when the clouds of danger darkened over it, and there was no other to help me ;—he did so at the peril of his own : but, more than that, he forgave me the bitter wrong which I had inconsiderately done to him. He saw that my heart was almost broken, and my spirit wounded, and he soothed it at the expense of his own :—others would have washed away their injuries in my blood, but he requited them with benefits on my head. I swore never to forget his generous devotion, but to return it once and for ever with equal sincerity and zeal. This oath will I keep, though torments and death be the consequence ! I would have served you, Khan ! to the last drop of my blood and the latest breath of my nostrils : but that is past,—I can hold no intercourse with the slayers of my friend. Call your executioners,—the cord or the sword are equal to me. I seek but to join him in death whose life I would have preserved at the sacrifice of my own !”

“ And you shall preserve it, youth ! you shall preserve it. You have fought a gallant fight, and fairly won the prize. Nay, do not look so wildly, man—he lives, and shall do so !—you have Nader’s word for it, and that shall not fail you. We did but try your constancy, young man ; and you have nobly stood the trial. You spoke the truth, you had our promise of a boon without reserve, and to receive it was your due ; but, by the head of the Khan ! we never dreamed it should have been a boon like this ; nor, to say truth, would it have been well to make an easy grant of it. You had a good cause, and fought hard for it, but it was a dangerous game, and let me counsel you, young man, to play at it no more. To chafe the lion whose paw may crush you, is idle as well as perilous—others may forget themselves as well as you, and wrath may do what reason will in vain regret.

"And now we dismiss you for the present :—Go to your friend, be the bearer of good tidings : tell him he is free, and that Nader desires to enlist on his side those talents and that courage which till now have been so boldly ranged against him : make your own terms, but secure him as my servant—Go—and good fortune attend you."

I attempt not to paint my amazement at this most unlooked-for turn of affairs. But the rapid change of my countenance, from the flush and agitation of high-wrought feelings to the wild and doubtful stare of astonishment, must have afforded no small amusement to the by-standers. As the words of Nader removed the veil from my eyes, and discovered the means which had been used to check my unwise and needless impetuosity, affection and gratitude, revived in my breast, and deprived me of all utterance. I could only prostrate myself on the ground before my indulgent master, and kiss the hand he held forth to me ; and covering my face with my cloak, I concealed as best I could the flood of tears that burst from the fulness of my heart. The look of benevolent kindness which he cast on me as I quitted the court, would alone have rewarded me for half my sufferings.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CONCLUSION.

Joy, like despair, has extremes which admit not of description. Language cannot tell the raptures of lovers who are united after years of absence and suffering ;—the delight of a parent who recovers a lost child ;—the full, the generous happiness of true friends, restored to each other after many toils and dangers :—nor can I attempt to describe the thrilling sensations with which I flew to the prison, and rushing into the arms of my friend, now no longer denied to me, announced the happy tidings of liberty and pardon.

The mind of Selim, better schooled in misfortune, re-

ceived this unexpected intelligence with a calmness that astonished, and almost hurt me.—“Be not surprised, my dear friend,” said he in reply to my remonstrance at his strange indifference, “that the boon of prolonged existence is received by me as one of questionable value : life holds out very different prospects to me and to you :—honour, happiness and fame, smile upon your path, and well are you fitted to enjoy these blessings ; my steps must wander through a dark and desolate track, already stripped of all that once made it sweet to my eyes. Besides, the traveler who is equipped for an inevitable journey, loves not to be delayed, even for a season. My soul, Ismael, was prepared to meet the destroying angel, and though a soldier should at all times be found ready for that encounter, it never could have happened to me at a fitter time.—But come, it were ungrateful to cloud your joy, or to receive your well-meant and devoted efforts with indifference ; let us go to my sister and relieve her mind of the pain she must of late have suffered. But let us be wary ; it is right she should be prepared for so unlooked-for an interview.”

Shireen had never been made aware of the extreme peril in which her brother stood. When at any time I spoke of interfering in his favour, I industriously strove to banish from her mind all doubt as to the issue : and though it was not possible to succeed in this entirely, hope still predominated greatly over fear. Neither had she been needlessly terrified by the alarming tidings of my arrest :—for a Furosh of Nader’s household was sent to my house to declare that I had been despatched on business of the General’s, and might not return for many days. Rumours of some of the occurrences at the palace had indeed reached her, and she had suffered some uneasiness from vague accounts of intended executions ; but the precautions taken, had been effectual to a great extent, and she was spared the wretchedness of knowing that the exterminating sword was suspended by so slight a thread over the heads of her only two earthly protectors.

When, therefore, I stood before her upon my return home, she only believed I had arrived from distant duty, and welcomed me accordingly. It was when I sought to

prepare her for the meeting with her brother—for the painful change she must observe in his appearance—for finding him so haggard and prison-worn; it was then that my tongue faltered, and her ready apprehension was awakened. "What of him, Ismael?" cried she, gasping for breath, "speak! speak out at once—oh, keep me not in misery!—He is dead, I am sure of it!—Oh, God! they have murdered him!" This needless alarm, the result of my own mismanagement, confounded me so much, that too much agitated to repair my error, I could only exclaim, "He is not dead! Shireen—look up, he is here!" and putting back the curtain, behind which her brother was concealed, I drew him forward. She uttered a piercing scream, and darting towards him, sank senseless in his arms!

But human happiness is ever chequered—it is only the joys of Paradise that know no shade of sorrow. It was not until some days were past, and the first emotions of delight at Selim's safety were somewhat sobered, that I recollected the orders of the General to enlist him in his service, the compliance with which condition might in some degree be considered as the terms of his pardon. The recollection of this commission, however, only increased my pleasure, for not a doubt ever entered my mind that Selim, ruined as he was in family and prospects, would eagerly close with an offer, which would afford him employment of the kind he best loved, and the society of the few beings upon earth in whom he now could feel an interest.

But my ardour was checked by the grave look of dissent which clouded his countenance when I unfolded to him the General's desire. "No! no!" said he, shaking his head, "Ismael, that may not be—I cannot be the servant of your General.—Alone as I stand in the world—bereaved of friends, of family and tribe, I cannot forget that I have been a Toorkoman chief—and such, free and unshackled will I remain while life endures.—I cannot forget that Nader Koolee has the blood of our race upon his hands and that its last exterminating blow was dealt by him;—how could I serve its destroyer? If such are the terms of liberty and life, take me back to my prison:—

let the sword be bared once more ; my eyelids will not tremble at the dazzle of its blade.

“ But I would not have my friend deem me cold or ungrateful for all his zealous efforts in my favour—I would respect too the feelings of my sister ; severed though we may be in future, my affection for her can never diminish—for her sake, for yours, I am content to make some sacrifice of pride and feeling—I consent to live, but it must be unfettered. I never will serve Nader, but I will no longer molest him. It is vain to strive against destiny, and it was written that the Tekehhs should be humbled, and the Kuzzilbashes triumph—that the house of my fathers should be desolate, while that of Keerkloo should flourish. Nader is but an instrument in the hands of the Almighty ; and how should I oppose his omnipotent arm, so plainly revealed ?—No, I will strive with your chief no longer, and I promise solemnly never more to trouble the province of Khorasan, never to interfere with his authority in these countries. But as my life has been devoted to my tribe and to my house, my last efforts shall still be for them. I will seek to gather the scattered remnant, to revive their prosperity and regain our lost name in more distant regions. Who can tell what is written in the book of fate ? But if the wanton ambition of your chief should pursue us thither, my compact ceases, my forbearance is at an end : should Nader Koolee again by force or guile attempt to check or crush our rising fortunes, I will oppose him were he to come with all Persia in his train to work his unholy purposes. Such is my decision, and such declare it to your General ; take your own way to tell him it, but let the terms be such as may not be mistaken.”

This resolution of Selim's gave much distress to his sister and myself ; nor was it alone the pain of parting with him, probably for ever, that rendered me uneasy. I thought of the anger and disappointment of Nader, and dreaded the consequences of refusing the proposals of that rigid chief, whose intention it certainly was, not only to disarm a powerful enemy, but to confer an acceptable mark of kindness upon me in the person of my friend. Could he even be prevailed upon to overlook the

obstinacy of his uncompromising captive, the pain of seeing the well-meant kindness of my master rejected, was to me inexpressibly severe.

But there was no remedy; I could not venture on chafing the galled pride of Selim by father remonstrance, or rousing his indignation to a more unmanageable pitch, by hinting, still more plainly, how much his life might depend upon his acquiescence in the conqueror's terms. Perilous as it was, I preferred trusting to the generosity and favour of my master; and accordingly, without farther loss of time, I solicited a private audience, and explained, not without considerable embarrassment and hesitation, the views and determination of my friend. With no small anxiety I watched the first quick glance of surprise vanish in the deepening gloom of Nader's peculiar frown: but I knew that to tremble beneath that frown was only to increase its terrors; and I waited with all the external appearance of patience, until it should please him to give utterance to his thoughts or his decision, in words.

"Do you mean to declare," said he, after an ominous pause, "that your Toorkoman friend rejects our gracious offers?—Can it be that he refuses to enter my service?—Know you not—can he be ignorant, that my duty forbids me to release an enemy of the state? We waive the insolence of his refusal; but how could we, the guardian of the country, be held excused, were we to dismiss one of its bitterest enemies, again to lift the sword against it? Hah! answer me!—"

"My Lord, the determination of my friend has deeply grieved me. Were it on my own account alone, I should grieve that he declines the noble offers of your Highness, and that we cannot stand together in the day of battle against your foes; but still more on his own account do I lament that the feelings and opinions he indulges should disqualify him from entering the service of your Highness. But Selim, my Lord, will never more be the enemy of the state: he will seek his fortune in a distant country, and never again oppose your Highness, nor disturb the tranquillity of the country: to this he pledges himself, and with my head am I willing to guarantee the pledge. However I may regret or dissent from his opinions, I can tes-

tify to the high sense he entertains of your Highness' generosity, and to his resolution that, whatever may be his future destiny, it will be his pride to prove himself not unworthy of it. But his life and liberty are again at your Highness' disposal; and never, surely never, will the boon, already so nobly granted, be withheld, because a point of honour and of duty, be it false or true, has forced its object to decline a portion of the proffered grace."

A long pause ensued; and I watched with intense interest the gradual disappearance of the gloom which clouded the face of Nader. "Ismael," said he at last, "the pardon which has passed my lips I were loth to recall, especially when the boon has been granted to a worthy servant. For your friend's rejection of our proffered employment, although we deem his conduct to savour more of rashness than of wisdom, we shall not press its acceptance any farther. By the head of Allee! we are not so much at a loss for servants, as to thrust our favour on unwilling hearts. The pledge, however, which you offer for his future conduct towards the state and to ourselves is sufficient: nor do we deem that you run any risk in thus empawning it; for the man who resists his enemy bravely and openly to the last, and who disdains to purchase pardon by an easy falsehood, will never forfeit his promise, even when given to a foe. Your friend is therefore safe; life and liberty are his, on the conditions he himself has named; but we would see the youth, and speak with him. Go therefore, and bring him before us."

With a lighter step than that with which I entered, I quitted the presence, and flew to my friend. But, in spite of the favourable disposition in which I had left the General, I dreaded the interview he had desired; for I knew that a single unlucky turn of expression, the merest trifle in itself, might be sufficient to alarm the pride and inflame the passions of two such haughty and uncompromising characters. I sought therefore by all means to sooth the mind of Selim, and to lead him to conduct himself towards Nader as to a worthy and generous, though successful foe, beseeching him to consider the misery he would inflict upon his sister and myself, were he needlessly to rouse the chief's displeasure. He bade me be at ease,

for such was far from his intention ; that I might rely upon his prudence :—and thus assured, we proceeded to the presence of the General.

It was a striking and an interesting sight to see the dignified yet modest bearing of the young Desert warrior, as he stood in the presence of his conqueror. His countenance, still pale and emaciated from the hardships of confinement, was calm as his own noble mind ; and ere he cast his dark expressive eye upon the ground, he fixed it for a while in steady yet unassuming gaze upon the face of the chief.

The countenance of Nader was grave and composed as his own, but there was no sternness in its expression ; and though his eye was bent with searching keenness on his captive, it bore neither anger nor threatening in its glance. It seemed as if these two noble minds had comprehended each other in that first glance ; and the anxiety I felt was instantly relieved.

“ Young chief,” said Nader after a while, “ they tell me that thou dost reject the fair offers which thy friend was authorized to make thee on my part, and refuseth to enter my service. I would learn thy reasons for this conduct, and know why thou dost reject the tender of that favour which many a more prosperous chief might vainly struggle to obtain.”

“ My Lord,” replied Selim with collected firmness, “ I should be loth to awaken thy displeasure, or to reject with sullen thanklessness the proffer which was meant in kindness ; yet thy servant must answer in the words of truth—I should ill repay thy generous confidence by treachery or deceit. Long have thy race been the enemies of mine—the blood of the Affshars has often dyed the Tekeh lances ; and the race of my fathers have fallen—yea, fallen to a man, under the swords of thy people. In the wide Deserts where my fathers ranged, there breathes not one being with whom I can claim kindred !—their blood, my Lord, was shed by your commands. Doubtless it was the fate of war, but I cannot league with those who slew my kindred—I cannot serve their chief :—nay, Khan, I will say farther—but for one powerful reason, the terms cannot be named that would induce me to accept the life, the pardon, which I needs must say thou hast most generously grant-

ed. Thyself art now the leader of a brave and powerful tribe, and the tongues of men, as well as thy own deeds, declare thee to have the feelings of a chief—wouldst thou consent to sheathe thy sword, and swear never to draw it against thy hereditary foe! I know thou wouldst not: nor canst thou blame thy captive for feeling as thou couldst have done, had the fortune of war placed thee in his condition. But the hand of the Almighty too clearly points to thee as to its minister, and I dare no longer oppose his will; nor can I endure to break the only hearts which beat for me—the only ties which still bind me to life. I therefore am contented to preserve my life upon the terms which my friend, no doubt, has stated; and here I renew the pledge, declaring that wheresoever my fate may henceforth carry me, I will not come in arms against thee, Khan! nor join thy enemies against thy power here in Khorasan. Thou hast desired to know the reasons why I cannot serve thee;—in all candour and honesty have I thus declared them, and now I await thy farther commands.”

“Thou hast answered well, young chief,” said Nader; “thy bearing is bold as becomes a soldier, nor do I blame the spirit which cannot bend to ally itself with an hereditary foe, with whom it has a feud of blood. Willingly would I have ranked thee among my officers of trust; but as that cannot be, without abandoning thy worthiest feelings, it were shameful to urge thee, and pity if thou couldst be swayed to consent. The coat of mail is valuable, only as it resists alike the keen thrust or the stern blow; and thy worth were greatly less, if force or favour could win their way against thy honest feelings and thy conscience. We dismiss thee, therefore, free. Come no more as a foe to Khorasan: trouble not its borders by force or by faction. If Allah wills that we should meet beyond them, there will be a fair field for us, and let him win it whom Heaven favours. Meantime, thou shalt not depart without proofs that I love thy gallant spirit: for that, and for Ismael’s sake, thou shalt receive an honest gift from a fair and honourable foe:—nay, no refusal!—this binds thee to nought. Even between Roostum and Isfundear,* they say

* Two heroes of the fabulous history of Persia, whose single combat forms a fine episode in the heroic poem of Ferdousee.

that gifts were interchanged. For the present, rest thee with thy friend; recover thy strength and health; and when thou leavest us for thy Deserts, may Allah be thy guide!—tell to the thousand tribes of Tooraun,* that Nader Koolee, though he be stern and severe, can likewise be generous and just.”

It was but a day or two after this event, that returning from a visit to the family of the poor Jew, Abisham, I chanced to take the shortest way homeward, which led through an ancient burying ground, among the graves of which are many mausoleums of saints long dead, now often the haunt of pilgrims and religious wanderers. Passing close by one of these, I observed a tall figure standing alone in the mouldering porch; nor did the failing light of a rich summer evening prevent me from discovering at once, the commanding form of the Dervish, Sheikh Allee Calunder.

A recollection of the painful occasions upon which this mysterious personage had hitherto manifested his presence, together with the solemnity of the hour and of the scene, combined to excite in me a sense of awe which betrayed itself in a sudden start. But this time my conscience was free from guilt, and instantly recovering myself, I stood to receive his commands.

“Fear not, young man,” said he with mild solemnity; “thou hast no cause to tremble—leave terror to the guilty. Thrice has thy conduct summoned me to expose thy errors, or to snatch thee from the brink of that gulf to which thy crimes had hurried thee;—my errand now is of more gracious character. Reproach and stern denunciations of evil may fail to turn the profligate from their sinful course; but the frailty of human nature requires the encouragement of commendation and praise, to retain in the thorny path of virtue those who once have entered it. Hitherto my task has been to speak to thee in warnings or reproof; but now thy conduct merits another tone; thou hast acted an upright and an honest part, thou hast obeyed the dictates of thy better feelings, the impulse of thy nobler na-

* Tartary. Iraun and Tooraun were in former times the names given to the empires of Persia and of Tartary.

ture, in circumstances of peril and of difficulty :—the inward monitor approves, and willingly do I confirm its award. Proceed in thy present course ; be honest, generous, noble, firm ; support the weak, oppose the oppressor ; so shall thy soul know the peace of the just, thy cup shall be sweetened with the blessings of the afflicted, and thy rest shall be unbroken with sorrow ;—thy years shall be full of honour, and thy house shall flourish.

“ But let not thy present happiness cause thee to neglect thy duty—the blessings of Providence are sent to cheer, not to intoxicate the heart of man. A noble destiny awaits thee—thwart not the influence of thy star by folly or by sloth, but hearken to the call of honour and of duty, which soon will summon thee from thy present life of ease to one of toil and of exertion. And now, my son, farewell !—forget not the gracious warnings, the precious lessons of wisdom, which Allah in his mercy hath vouchsafed to thee ; let thy prayers duly arise to him for strength and support, and mayest thou live for ever under the shadow of his omnipotent arm !”

“ Stay ! mysterious being,” exclaimed I, as he turned to quit me—leave me not unsatisfied—tell me *who* and *what* thou art ? Say, whence is that influence of thine, which acts like a spell upon me, and sways me at thy will ? Tell me, shall we meet again ? Would that I knew how to seek thee in the hour of trouble !—would that thy warning voice could ever be at hand to snatch me from error and confirm my steps in the path of virtue !”

“ Forbear, my son !—no more !—the unhallowed wish to read the dark page of futurity hath already cost thy house full dear—who and what I am concerns not thee to know ; seek not to discover what may be concealed from thee in mercy ! Whether we may ever meet again, is known but to *One* whose humble messenger I am ; and of this be sure, that any effort on thy part to hasten such a meeting could end but in disappointment and misery. Be strong then, my son, in virtuous resolutions—strive to do well, and trust for support in the might of the Most High, who can breathe into the weakest of his creatures a strength that can baffle the most powerful of the spirits of evil. Seek

to detain me no longer.—Once more, may Heaven protect thee !” As he uttered these words, he glided from me, and his form was lost in the deepening obscurity of the night.

At length the time arrived when Selim must depart. He had tarried until he saw me united to his sister by the strictest bonds of our law ; but the ruddiness of returning health had scarce revisited his pale cheek, ere the thought of his high duties roused him to action, and he prepared to bid us farewell. Rejecting the gifts I fain would have heaped on him, he only would accept of that which once had been his parting gift to me—a warrior’s outfit ; and I took care that it should be complete.

“ Oh yet, my brother, go not from us !” exclaimed Shireen, wringing her hands in bitter grief, as, all equipped for his journey, he stood before us for the last time ; “ Be—think you, that you have no object to love—none to love you when you go to the desolate plains where our tents once stood and our flocks pastured. All is silent there ! Think that you leave behind you all that in this wide world you have to care for—the only beings on earth whose blood is of the same stream as yours, and who would spill it all to serve you. Do not go from us, then, my brother ! let us be one family as once we were, and we may yet see many happy days !”

A pang of feeling for a moment convulsed the calm and noble countenance of her brother ; his cheek was flushed with a glow of deep emotion ; but it quickly passed away, and all was pale, sad, and tranquil as before. “ No ! my dear sister—no ! it cannot be. I was born a Desert bird, and such must I die ; I am choked with the pent-up air of your cities ; the conventional arrangements and the artificial restraints of civilized life are intolerable to me. I must be free—I require the interminable Desert to breathe in, and a range to wander over, bounded only by my own will. No ! the gourkhur of the Desert cannot be tamed—the antelope endures not confinement—if you clip the falcon’s wings, he pines and dies. No, my dear sister ! your Ismael’s temper, kindly, warm, and social, yet noble, generous, and ardent, is fitted for intercourse with those who

dwell in cities ; there he is in his own sphere ; he will be loved and respected among such men, and with them should he remain. But I, wild, ungovernable, enthusiastic and ambitious, must not wander from mine. Our kindred are gone, my sister! already does the rank herbage cover their bones ; the ashes of their habitations have been scattered to the four winds of heaven. Of our tribe but a few remain, the scattered pearls of a broken chaplet ; but they do not the less demand the protection of their chief. It shall be my care to reunite them ; with them will I range the Deserts where my fathers dwelt. I will once more establish the fortune of my tribe, and exalt the name of Tekh ; or the last of my race shall find a nameless grave in its wide and barren bosom. Farewell, dearest sister ! Ismael, my friend, my brother, once more, farewell !—if we meet not again on earth, we shall in Paradise. May your path be ever prosperous, and may the arm of the Almighty be your protection !” He rushed from us, and in a moment was lost to our view.

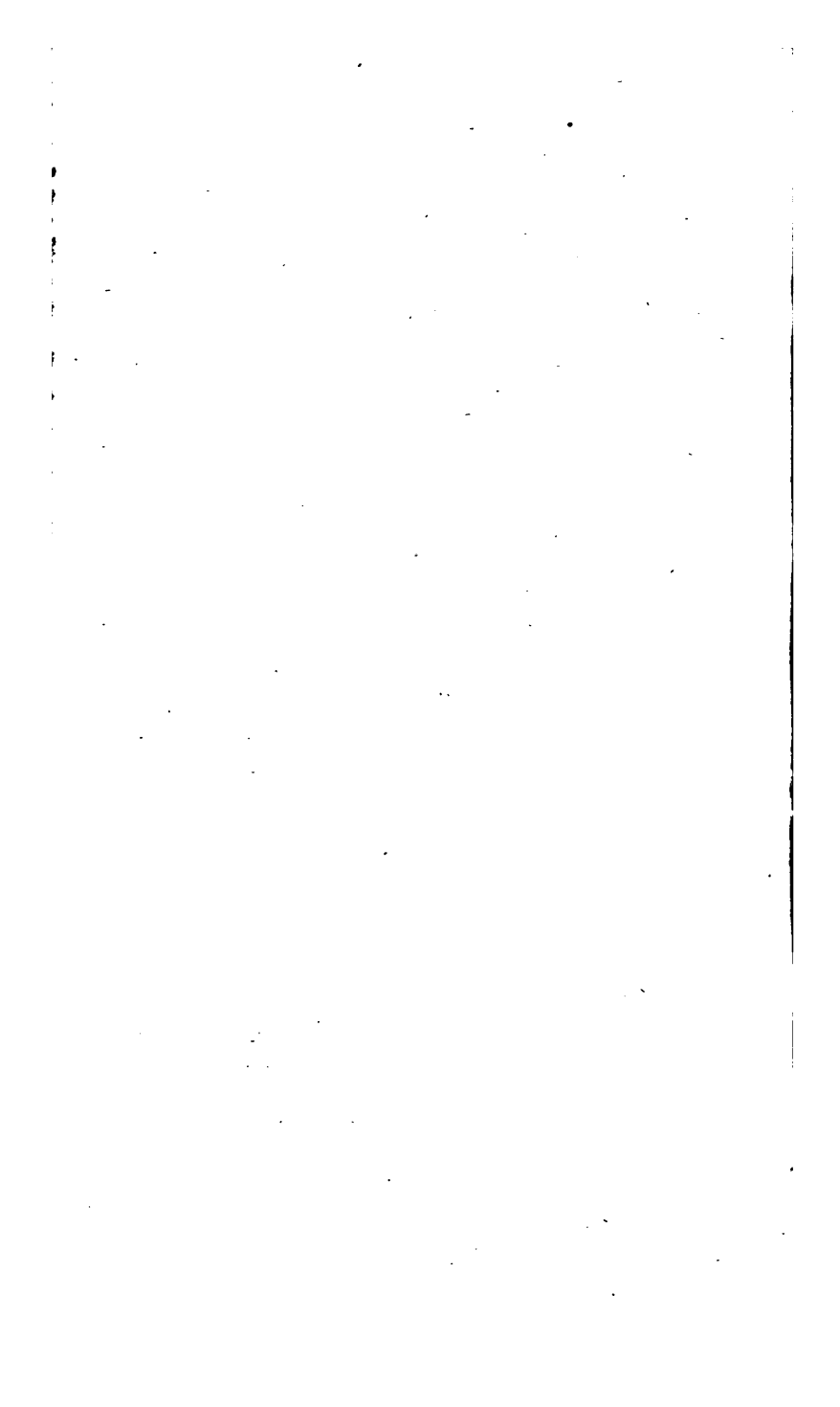
Courteous reader ! our tale has reached a point where adventures usually terminate : our hero, possessed of competence and rank, as well as of his long-lost mistress, might, with us, have had a fair prospect of ease and happiness for the rest of his days. But it is otherwise in Asia. Marriage, in countries where women are held as a secondary class of beings, and where a plurality of wives is admitted of by law, becomes an event too common and unimportant to affect materially the pursuits of life ; and, in point of fact, it is one which occurs, once at the least, to most young men before the period when the business of life is commenced in earnest.

In the present case, however, it chances to form a stage, a resting place, in the journey of our hero's life, where we can conveniently take leave of him for a season. Should this portion of our Kuzzilbash's adventures be fortunate enough to find favour with a liberal public, the labours of the translator may be renewed, and some farther passages

of his life, and that of his celebrated master, may be offered to their notice. In the mean time, he humbly takes his leave in the phrase of that hero's country—"Muhubut shumah cum na shewed!"—"Khodah hafiz shumah!"*

* "May your favour to your servant never diminish!"—"May God protect you"—or "have you in his remembrance!"

THE END.



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